

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
FILING AND SONS, LTD., GUILDFORD AND ESHER

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THE THREE MUSKETEERS.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ENGLISH AND FRENCH.

AT the appointed time the four guardsmen proceeded with their servants, to an inclosure behind the Luxembourg, which was kept as a pasture for goats. Athos gave some money to the goat-herd to keep out of the way; and the valets were ordered to do duty as sentinels.

A silent troop soon came to the same field and joined the musketeers; and then according to the English custom, the introductions took place.

The Englishmen were all persons of the highest rank. The singular names of the three friends, were, therefore, not only a subject of surprise to them, but also of disquietude.

“After all,” said Lord de Winter, when the three friends had been named, “we know not who you are, and we will not fight with men bearing such names. These names of yours are clowns’ names.”

“As you imagine, my lord, they *are* false names,” said Athos.

“Which makes us more desirous of knowing your real ones,” said the Englishman.

" You have played against us without knowing them," said Athos, " and as a token of it, won our horses."

" It is true ; but then we only hazarded our pistoles, now we peril our blood. A man may play with anybody, but one only fights with one's equals."

" That is fair," said Athos.

He then took aside the Englishman with whom he was to fight, and told him his name in a whisper. Porthos and Aramis did the same.

" Does that satisfy you ?" asked Athos, of his adversary, " and do you find me sufficiently noble to do me the favor to cross swords with me ?"

" Yes, sir," said the Englishman, bowing.

" Well, then, now you will allow me to say one thing to you ?" coolly resumed Athos.

" What is that ?" said the Englishman.

" It is, that you would have done well not to insist on my making myself known."

" Why so ?"

" Because I am thought to be dead. I have reasons for desiring that it may not be known that I am alive; therefore, I shall be obliged to kill you, that my secret may not be divulged."

The Englishman looked at Athos, thinking the latter was jesting. But Athos was in serious earnest.

" Gentlemen," said he, addressing his companions and their adversaries, " are we all ready ?"

" Yes !" replied, with one voice, both English and French.

" Guard, then !" said Athos.

And immediately eight swords glittered in the rays of the setting sun, and the combat began with a fury which was natural enough between men who were doubly enemies.

Athos fenced with as much calmness and method as if he had been in a school of arms.



"BY A VIGOROUS THRUST HE DISARMED HIM."

Porthos, cured, no doubt, of over-confidence by his adventure at Chantilly, played a game full of dexterity and prudence.

Aramis, who had the third canto of his poem to finish, worked away like a man in a hurry.

Athos was the first to kill his adversary. He had only given him one wound, but, as he had forewarned him, that one was mortal, for it passed directly through his heart.

Porthos next stretched his opponent on the grass; having pierced his thigh. Then, as the Englishman had given up his sword, Porthos took him in his arms, and carried him to his carriage.

Aramis pushed his so vigorously that, after having driven him back fifty paces, he ended by disabling him.

As for D'Artagnan, he had simply and purely played a defensive game. Then, when he saw that his adversary was quite weary, by a vigorous thrust he disarmed him. The baron, finding himself without a sword retreated two or three steps; but his foot slipping as he stepped away, he fell upon his back.

With one bound D'Artagnan was upon him, and, pointing his sword at his throat,

"I could kill you, sir," said he to the Englishman, "but I give you life from love to your sister."

D'Artagnan was overwhelmed with joy; he had accomplished the plan he had designed, whose development now brightened his face with smiles.

The Englishman, enchanted at having to deal with so complete a gentleman, pressed D'Artagnan in his arms, and complimented the three musketeers a thousand times. And then, as Porthos's adversary was already installed in the carriage, and Aramis's had fairly run away, they had only to attend to Athos's victim.

As Porthos and Aramis undressed him in the hope that his wound was not mortal, a heavy purse fell from

his belt. D'Artagnan picked it up and presented it to Lord de Winter.

"Ah, and what the deuce am I to do with that?" said the Englishman.

"You will restore it to his family," said D'Artagnan.

"His family will care but little about this trifle. They will inherit an income of fifteen thousand louis. Keep this purse for your valets."

D'Artagnan put the purse in his pocket.

"And now, my young friend—for I hope that you will permit me to call you by that name," said Lord de Winter, "I will, if you wish, present you this evening to my sister, for I wish her ladyship to take you into her favor; and, as she is not entirely without influence at court, perhaps a word from her may be useful to you hereafter."

D'Artagnan glowed with delight, and gave an assenting bow.

During this scene Athos came up to D'Artagnan.

"What do you propose to do with that purse?" he said to him in a low tone, privately.

"I proposed to place it in your hands, my dear Athos."

"Mine? Why would you do that?"

"*Parbleu!* You killed him; these are the spoils of war."

"I inherit from an enemy!" said Athos. "What, then, do you think of me?"

"It is the custom of war," said D'Artagnan. "Why should it not be the custom in a duel?"

"Even on the field of battle," replied Athos, "I have never done that."

Porthos shrugged his shoulders. Aramis, with a movement of his lips, gave signs of approval.

"Then," said D'Artagnan, "let us give that money to the lackeys, as Lord de Winter suggested."

"Yes," said Athos, "let us give this purse, not to our own, but to the English servants."

Athos took the purse, and threw it to the coachman.

"For you and your comrades," cried he.

Such loftiness of spirit in a man without a penny,

struck even Porthos himself; and this French generosity, being told by Lord de Winter to his friends, had a great effect everywhere, except with Messrs. Grimaud, Planchet, Musqueton, and Bazin.

As Lord de Winter left D'Artagnan, he gave him his sister's address. She lived at No. 6, in the Place Royale, which was at that time the fashionable part of the town. He also engaged to call for him to present him, and D'Artagnan made an appointment, for eight o'clock, at Athos's chambers.

This presentation to "My Lady" occupied all the thoughts of our young Gascon. He recalled the singular manner in which this young woman had before then crossed his path; and, although convinced that she was but one of the cardinal's tools, he yet felt himself irresistibly drawn to her by a sentiment that was inexplicable. His only fear was that she might recognize him as the man whom she had seen at Meung and at Dover. Then she would also know that he was a friend of M. de Treville, and, consequently, was heart and soul devoted to the king; and this would involve a loss of much of his advantage over her, since as soon as she knew him as well as he knew her, the game between them would be equal. As for her incipient intrigue with M. de Wardes, our self-complacent gentlemen thought but little of that, although the count was young, rich, handsome, and high in favor with the cardinal. It is a good thing to be twenty years of age, and moreover, a native of Tarbes.

D'Artagnan began by dressing himself in magnificent style at home; and he then went to Athos, and according to his custom, told him everything. Athos listened to his projects, then shook his head, and recommended prudence in a tone almost of bitterness.

"What!" said he, "you have just lost one woman whom you thought good, charming, perfect, and now you are running after another."

D'Artagnan felt the justice of the reproach.

"I love Madame Bonancieux," said he, "with my heart; but I love 'My Lady' with my head; and, by going to her house, I hope to enlighten myself as to the character she plays at court."

"Egad! the character she plays is not difficult to guess, after all that you have told me. She is some emissary of the cardinal's, a woman who will draw you into a trap, where you will right easily leave your head."

"The plague! My dear Athos, you seem to me to look at things on the dark side."

"My dear fellow, I distrust women—what would you have? I have paid for my experience. And particularly fair women. This lady is fair, did you not say?"

"She has the finest light hair that was ever seen."

"Ah! my poor D'Artagnan!" said Athos.

"Listen! I wish to enlighten myself; and then, when I have learnt what I want to know, I will leave her."

"Enlighten yourself, then!" said Athos, coldly.

Lord de Winter arrived at the appointed time; but Athos, who had been warned beforehand, went into the inner room. His lordship, therefore, found D'Artagnan alone, and, as it was nearly eight o'clock, they set out at once.

An elegant carriage was in waiting at the door, and, as two excellent horses were harnessed to it, they were almost immediately at the Place Royale.

Her ladyship received D'Artagnan graciously. Her house was furnished with remarkable splendor; and although the English generally, frightened away by the war, were quitting, or were about to quit France, she proved, by the new outlays which she had just made, that the public measures which drove away the English had no influence on her.

"You see," said Lord de Winter, as he presented D'Artagnan to his sister, "a young gentleman who had my life in his hands, but would not misuse his advantage, although we were doubly enemies, since it was I who

insulted him, and I am, also, an Englishman. Thank him, therefore, madame, on my behalf, if you have any good-will for me."

The lady slightly frowned: an almost imperceptible cloud passed over her brow; and then a smile so singular appeared upon her lips, that the young man, who saw this triple change, almost shuddered.

Her brother observed nothing; for he had turned aside to play with the lady's favorite monkey, who had pulled him by the doublet.

"Welcome, sir," said the lady, in a voice the singular softness of which contrasted strangely with the symptoms of ill-humor which D'Artagnan had just observed; "for you have this day acquired a lasting claim upon my gratitude."

The Englishman then turned toward them, and related all the circumstances of the combat. Her ladyship listened with the greatest attention; yet it was easy to see, that, in spite of her endeavors to conceal her emotion, the account was not agreeable to her. The blood mounted to her face, and her little foot trembled beneath her dress.

Lord de Winter perceived nothing of this, for, as soon as he had ended, he went to a table on which there was a salver, with a bottle of Spanish wine upon it, and filling two glasses, he invited D'Artagnan to drink.

D'Artagnan knew that it would displease an Englishman to decline a toast. He went therefore to the table, and took the second glass. But he had not lost sight of the lady, and by the aid of a mirror, he was a witness to another change which took place in her countenance. Now that she thought she was unobserved, her features assumed an expression which almost amounted to that of ferocity.

She tore her handkerchief to pieces with her teeth.

The pretty waiting-maid, whom D'Artagnan had noticed, then entered. She spoke a few words in English

to Lord de Winter, who immediately begged D'Artagnan's permission to withdraw, excusing himself on account of the urgency of the business that called him away, and commissioning his sister to obtain his pardon.

D'Artagnan shook hands with Lord de Winter, and returned to her ladyship. The countenance of this lady had, with a surprising power of change, resumed its pleasing expression; but some red stains upon her handkerchief proved that she had bitten her lips until they bled.

Those lips were magnificent: one would have thought them beautifully carved from scarlet coral.

The conversation now became animated. Her ladyship appeared entirely recovered. She explained that Lord de Winter was her brother-in-law, and not her brother. She had married a younger son of the family, and was left a widow, with a son. This child was the sole heir of Lord de Winter, if his lordship did not marry. All this discovered to D'Artagnan a veil which concealed something, but he could not yet distinguish anything beneath that veil.

After a half-hour's conversation, D'Artagnan was quite convinced that her ladyship was his own country-woman; she spoke French with a purity and elegance that left small room for doubt in that respect.

D'Artagnan uttered abundant gallantries and protestations of devotion; and, at all these fooleries that escaped from him, the lady smiled most sweetly. The hour for departure came at last, and D'Artagnan took leave of her ladyship, and quitted her drawing-room the happiest of men.

On the staircase he met the pretty waiting-maid, who, having touched him gently in passing, blushed to the very eyes, and begged his pardon, in a voice so sweet, that forgiveness was at once conferred.

D'Artagnan returned the next day, and received a still more favorable reception. Lord de Winter was not pres-

ent; and it was her ladyship herself, on this occasion, who did the honors of the evening. She seemed to take a great interest in him; inquiring who he was, and all about his friends ; and whether he had not sometimes thought of attaching himself to the cardinal's service.

D'Artagnan, who, as we know, was very prudent for a youth of twenty, then remembered his suspicions concerning her ladyship. He uttered a fine eulogium on the cardinal, saying that he should not have failed to enter His Eminence's guards had he first chanced to know M. de Cavois, instead of M. de Treville.

The lady changed the conversation without the slightest affectation ; and, with the utmost apparent indifference of manner, asked him whether he had ever been in England.

He replied that he had once been sent over by M. de Treville, to negotiate for a supply of horses, and had even brought back four as a sample. In the course of this conversation, her ladyship bit her lips three or four times; she had to deal with a youth who played a pretty close game.

D'Artagnan withdrew at the same hour as on the previous visit. In the corridor he again met pretty Kitty, for that was the Abigail's name. The latter looked at him with an expression of mysterious interest. But D'Artagnan was so engrossed by the mistress, that he observed nothing that did not refer to her.

He returned to her ladyship's on the next day, and the next again ; and on each occasion was vouchsafed a more flattering welcome.

Every evening, too—either in the ante-chamber, in the corridor, or on the staircase—he was sure to meet the pretty maid.

But, as we have already said, D'Artagnan paid no attention to this strange perseverance on the part of poor Kitty.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AN ATTORNEY'S DINNEE.

THE duel, in which Porthos had played such a brilliant part, had not made him forget the dinner to which he was invited by the attorney's wife. The next day, therefore, at about one o'clock, having received the last polish from Musqueton's brush, he proceeded to the Rue aux Ours.

His heart beat, but it was not, like that of D'Artagnan, with a youthful and impatient sentiment. No, a more material influence conducted him : he was at last about to cross that mysterious threshold, to ascend that unknown staircase, up which the golden fees of Master Coquenard had mounted one by one. He was really about to see a certain strong-box, of which he had so often beheld the image in his dream—a strong-box, long, and deep in form ; padlocked, barred and fastened to the floor—a strong-box of which he had so often heard, and which the attorney's hands were now about to open before his admiring eyes.

And then he—the wandefer over the face of the earth—the man without fortune, or family—the soldier, who frequented wine-shops, inns, and taverns, and posadas—the glutton, generally obliged to be contented with chance mouthfuls—was about to taste a family meal, to enjoy a comfortable home.

To go in his capacity of cousin, and sit daily at a good table—to smooth the yellow-wrinkled brow of the old attorney—to pluck the young clerks a little, by teaching

them the greatest niceties of basset, hazard, and lansquenet, and by winning of them, by way of recompense for the lesson he should give them in an hour, all that they had saved within a month—all this accorded well with the singular manners of the times, and prodigiously delighted Porthos.

And yet the musketeer remembered the many bad reports which were current concerning attorneys; their thrifts, their parings, and their fast days; but as, after all, with the exception of some fits of economy, which Porthos had always found truly unseasonable, the attorney's wife had been very liberal—that is, for an attorney's wife, be it understood—he still hoped to meet with an establishment maintained upon a creditable scale.

At the door, however, he began to feel some doubt. Its appearance was not inviting—there was a dark and filthy passage, and a badly lighted staircase, to which a grayish light penetrated, through a grating from a neighboring courtyard. On the first floor, he found a low door, studded with enormous nails, like the principal gate of the prison of the Grand Châtelet.

Porthos knocked with his knuckles: and a tall clerk, pale, and buried beneath a forest of hair, opened the door and bowed to him with the manner of a man who is compelled to respect in another, the size which denotes strength, the military costume which denotes station, and the vermillion complexion which denotes a habit of living well.

There was another clerk, rather shorter, behind the first; another clerk, rather taller, behind the second; and a little stump-in-the-gutter, of twelve years old behind the third.

In all there were three clerks and a half, which, considering the period, announced a highly prosperous business.

Although the soldier was not to arrive till one o'clock, yet the attorney's wife had been on the outlook since

noon, and reckoned on the heart, and, perhaps, on the stomach, of her adorer making him come a little before the appointed time.

Madame Coquenard, approaching by the door of the apartment, met her guest almost at the moment that he arrived by the staircase-door, and the appearance of the worthy dame relieved Porthos from a great deal of embarrassment, for the clerks were looking on him with envious eyes: and he, hardly knowing what to say to this ascending and descending gamut, had remained entirely mute.

"It is my cousin," exclaimed the attorney's wife. "Come in, then—come in, M. Porthos."

The name of Porthos was not without its effect upon the clerks, who began to laugh; but Porthos turned, and all their countenances at once resumed their gravity. They reached the sanctum of the attorney, after having passed through an ante-chamber in which the clerks were, and an office in which they ought to have been. This latter was a dark room, well furnished with dusty papers. On leaving the office, they passed the kitchen on the right hand, and entered the drawing-room.

All these rooms, overlooking one another, did not produce in Porthos very pleasant ideas. Every word could be heard afar off, through all these open doors; and then, in passing, he had cast a quick, investigating glance into the kitchen, and he confessed to himself, to the disgrace of his hostess and his own great regret, that he had not discovered that bustle, that animation, that activity, which, on the approach of an abundant meal, generally reigns throughout that sanctuary of gluttony.

The attorney had undoubtedly been informed of this anticipated visit, for he expressed no surprise at the sight of Porthos, who advanced toward him in an easy manner, and saluted him politely.

"We are cousins, it seems, M. Porthos?" said the attorney, raising himself, by means of his arms, from his cane-work easy-chair.

The old man, enveloped in a large black doublet, in which his shrivelled frame was lost, was yellow and weakly; his gray eyes glittered like carbuncles, and appeared, with his grinning mouth to be the only part of his countenance in which life remained. Unfortunately, the legs had begun to refuse their services to this bony machine; and for the last five or six months, during which this weakness had been felt, the worthy attorney had almost become a slave to his wife.

The cousin was received with resignation—nothing more. With good legs, Master Coquenard would have declined all relationship to M. Porthos.

"Yes, sir, we are cousins," replied Porthos, without being at all disconcerted; for, in fact, he had never calculated on being received by the husband with enthusiasm.

"Through the sex, I believe?" said the attorney, maliciously.

Porthos did not understand the sneer, but mistook it for simplicity, and laughed at it beneath his thick mustache. Madame Coquenard, who knew that simplicity in an attorney would be a rare variety of the species, smiled a little, and blushed a good deal.

Master Coquenard had, since Porthos's arrival, cast many a glance of uneasiness at a large press, placed opposite his own oaken escritoire. Porthos comprehended that this press, although it did not respond in form to that which he had seen in his dreams, must be the enchanting strong-box, and he congratulated himself on the fact that the reality was at least six feet-taller than the dream.

Master Coquenard did not carry his genealogical investigation any further; but, transferring an uneasy glance from the press to Porthos, he contented himself with saying.

"Your cousin will favor us with his company at dinner before he departs for the campaign, will he not, Madame Coquenard?"

This time Porthos received the blow full in the chest

and felt it too ; nor did Madame Coquenard appear entirely insensible to it, for she added :

“ My cousin will not repeat his visit if he finds that we do not treat him well ; but, on the other hand, he has too short a time to pass in Paris, and consequently to see us, for us not to beg of him almost all the moments that he can devote to us before his departure.”

“ Oh, my legs—my poor dear legs ! ” muttered M. Coquenard, with an attempt to smile.

This assistance, which had reached Porthos at the moment when his gastronomic hopes were assailed, inspired the musketeer with exceeding gratitude toward the attorney’s wife.

The hour of dinner shortly sounded. They entered the dining-room, which was a large dark room, situated opposite the kitchen.

The clerks who, as it seemed, had snuffed up some perfumes unusual in that house, came with military exactness, and held their stools in their hands, in perfect readiness for sitting down. They might be seen moving their jaws beforehand with an ominous eagerness.

“ Lord bless us ! ” thought Porthos, casting a look at these three famished beings—for the stump in the gutter was not, as we may suppose admitted to the honors of the master’s table—“ Lord bless us ! In my cousin’s place I would not keep such gormandizers. One would take them for shipwrecked people, who had eaten nothing for six weeks.”

M. Coquenard entered, pushed forward in his easy chair by madame, when Porthos, in his turn, assisted in rolling her husband to the table.

Scarcely had he entered before he began to move his nose and jaws after the fashion of the clerks.

“ Oh, oh ! ” said he, “ here is soup which is quite alluring.”

“ What the plague do they smell so extraordinary in this soup ? ” thought Porthos, on beholding a tureen

of abundant, but pale and thin broth, on the top of which a few straggling crusts floated, like islands in an archipelago.

Madame Coquenard smiled; and, on a sign from her, they all eagerly seated themselves.

M. Coquenard was served first, and Porthos next. Madame Coquenard then filled her own plate and distributed the crusts, without soup, to the three impatient clerks.

At this moment the door of the dining-room opened with a creak, and between the gaping panels Porthos could perceive the poor little clerk, who, unable to participate in the feast itself, was eating his dry bread, betwixt the odor of the kitchen and the dining-room.

After the soup, the servant-girl brought in a boiled fowl—a profusion which expanded the eyelids of the revellers until they seemed almost about to melt entirely away.

“It is very perceptible that you love your family, Madame Coquenard,” said the attorney, with a grin that was almost tragic; “this is indeed a compliment which you have paid your cousin.”

The poor fowl was atrociously thin, and covered with that bristling skin, which the bones can never pierce in spite of their efforts; it must have been patiently sought for before it was detected on the perch to which it had withdrawn to die of old age.

“Faith!” thought Porthos, “this is but a melancholy prospect; I respect old age; but I hardly relish it boiled or roasted.”

He looked around to see if his own opinion was the general one, but on the contrary, he saw nothing but glaring eyes, devouring by anticipation this venerable bird, which he so much despised.

Madame Coquenard drew the dish toward her, adroitly detached the two great black paws, which she placed on her husband’s plate; cut off the neck, which, together

with the head, she laid aside for herself : took off a wing for Porthos ; and then returned the bird, otherwise untouched, to the servant who had brought it in : so that it had completely disappeared before the musketeer had found time to note the changes which disappointment had wrought upon the various visages, according to the respective characters and dispositions of those who experienced it.

After the hen a dish of beans made its appearance—an enormous dish in the midst of which sundry mutton-bones, which might, at first sight, have been supposed to be accompanied by some meat, displayed themselves.

But the clerks were not the dupes of this deception, and their melancholy looks now settled into resignation.

Madame Coquenard, with the moderation of a thrifty housewife, distributed these viands amongst the young men.

The time for wine was come. M. Coquenard poured from a stone bottle of very slender proportions the third of a glass for each of the clerks, about an equal quantity for himself, and then passed the bottle to the side of Porthos and madame.

The young men filled up their glasses with water; when they had drank half, they again filled them up with water, and by repeating this process, they had come, by the end of the feast, to swallow a beverage which had been transmuted from the deep tint of the ruby to the washy pink of a burnt topaz.

Porthos slowly masticated his fowl's wing, and shuddered when, beneath the table, he felt madame's knee searching for his own. He also drank half a glass of this cherished wine, which he recognized as that horrible Montreuil, the terror of practised palates, whilst Master Coquenard sighed as he saw him swallow the wine undiluted.

"Will you eat any of these beans, cousin Porthos?"

inquired Madame Coquenard, in a tone which plainly said —“Take my word for it, you had better not.”

“Thank you, cousin; I am no longer hungry,” replied Porthos. There was a hideous pause. Porthos no longer knew how to demean himself, for the attorney kept repeating :

“Ah, Madame Coquenard, I compliment you kindly; your dinner was a positive feast. Lord! how I have eaten!”

Maitre Coquenard had consumed his soup, the black paws of the fowl, and the only mutton-bone that had on it any meat.

Porthos suspected that they were quizzing him, and began to curl his mustache and knit his brow; but a look from Madame Coquenard recommended forbearance.

That silence and the pause in the feast, which to Porthos was unintelligible, had, on the other hand, a mournful significance to the clerks; on a glance from the attorney and a smile from the attorney's wife, they slowly rose from the table, folded their napkins still more slowly, and then bowed and departed.

“Go, young men; go, and aid digestion by working,” said the attorney, with great gravity.

The clerks being gone, Madame Coquenard arose, and drew from a cupboard a morsel of cheese, some confection of quinces, and a cake which she had herself manufactured with almonds and honey.

M. Coquenard frowned anew, when he saw this more ample provision. Porthos pouched his lips because he saw nothing of which to make a dinner.

“A feast! decidedly a feast!” cried Maitre Coquenard, moving uneasily in his chair. “‘*Epulas epularum*’—Lucullus dines with Lucullus.”

Porthos looked at the bottle, which was near him, and hoped that, with wine, bread, and cheese, he might yet make a dinner: but the wine was soon gone, the bottle being emptied, and neither Master nor Madame Coquenard seemed to observe it.

"Very well," said Porthos to himself, "here I am, out-generalized."

He passed his tongue over a small spoonful of the confection, and stuck his teeth together in Madame Coquenard's glutinous cake.

"And now," thought he, "the sacrifice is consummated. Ah! if I were not sustained by the hope of looking with Madame Coquenard into her husband's treasury!"

After the delight of such a repast, it was necessary for Master Coquenard to take his siesta. Porthos hoped that the affair would be managed in the very locality where he sat; but the attorney would hear of no such thing; it was necessary to conduct him to his own room, and he would not be easy till he was before his press, on the edges of which, as a greater precaution, he deposited his feet. The lady led Porthos into an adjoining room, where they proceeded to establish the conditions of their reconciliation.

"You may come and dine here three times a week," said Madame Coquenard.

"Thank you," said Porthos, "but I do not wish to abuse a good thing. Besides, I must think of my equipment."

"That's true," said the lady, with a sigh. "There is that wretched equipment."

"Alas, yes!" said Porthos, "that's it."

"But of what does the equipment of your regiment consist, M. Porthos?"

"Oh, of a great many things," said Porthos; "the musketeers, as you know, are chosen troops, and they require many things unnecessary for the guards or Swiss."

"But yet you might give me some particulars of them."

"Why, they may amount to about—" commenced Porthos, who preferred the sum total to the detail.

The attorney's wife listened in trembling expectation.

"To how much?" said she. "I hope it will not exceed——" She stopped, for words failed her.

"Oh, no," said Porthos, "it will not exceed two thousand five hundred francs. I believe, indeed, that, by being economical, I could manage with two thousand."

"Good Heavens! two thousand francs!" exclaimed she. "Why, it is quite a fortune."

Porthos made a significant grimace which madame well understood.

"I asked the particulars," said she, "because, as I have many relations and connections in trade, I am sure to be able to get the things a hundred per cent. cheaper than you could buy them for yourself."

"Ah!" said Porthos, "is that what you meant?"

"Yes, dear M. Porthos. And so you will want first——"

"A horse."

"Yes, a horse. Well, I have got exactly the thing for you."

"Ah!" said Porthos, brightening up; "then that is arranged as regards my horse. I need, besides, a complete equipment for the horse, and that consists of articles which only a musketeer can purchase; they will cost more than three hundred francs."

"Three hundred francs? Well, call it three hundred francs," said the attorney's wife.

Porthos smiled. We may remember that he had the saddle sent by the Duke of Buckingham; he proposed putting three hundred francs slyly into his pocket.

"Then," he continued, "I shall need another horse for my servant and my baggage. As to arms, you need not trouble yourself; I have them."

"A horse for your servant?" resumed the attorney's wife, hesitating; "but that is really being almost too grand, my friend."

"Eh, madame!" said Porthos, haughtily; "do you happen to take me for a beggar?"

"Oh, no! I only mean to say, that a handsome mule

often looks as well as a horse ; and that it seems to me, by procuring a handsome mule for Musqueton——”

“ Well, as to a handsome mule,” said Porthos, “ you are right : I have seen many great Spanish noblemen, all whose followers were mounted upon mules. But then, you understand, Madame Coquenard, it must be a mule with plumes and bells.”

“ Rest quite easy on that score,” said the lady.

“ There only remains the portmanteau, then,” added Porthos.

“ Oh, do not let that disturb you,” replied Madame Coquenard ; “ my husband has five or six portmanteaus, and you shall choose the best. There is one, in particular, which he used to prefer on his journeys, and which is large enough to hold half the world.”

“ But is it empty, this portmanteau ? ” demanded Porthos.

“ Yes, certainly, it is empty,” replied the attorney’s wife.

“ Ah, but the portmanteau I want,” exclaimed Porthos, “ is a well-furnished one, my dear.”

Madame Coquenard breathed forth fresh sighs. Molière had not yet written his “ Miser ” ; Madame Coquenard anticipated Harpagon.

At length the remainder of the equipment was haggled over in the same manner ; and the result of the settling was that the attorney’s wife should ask her husband for a loan of eight hundred francs in hard cash, and should furnish the horse and mule which were to have the honor of bearing Porthos and Musqueton upon their way to glory.

These conditions having been arranged, and the interest and time of payment stipulated, Porthos took leave of Madame Coquenard, and returned home, half-famished, and in a very bad humor.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MAID AND MISTRESS.

NEVERTHELESS, as we have already said—in spite of the cries of conscience, in spite of the sage counsels of Athos, and tender memories of Madame Bonancieux—D'Artagnan became each hour more deeply enamored of her ladyship; nor did he ever fail to offer her a daily homage, to which the presumptuous Gascon was convinced that she must sooner or later respond.

As he arrived one evening, scenting the air like a man who was expecting a shower of gold, he met the waiting-maid at the carriage gate: but, on this occasion, the pretty Kitty was not contented with giving him a passing smile. She gently took his hand.

“Good!” thought D'Artagnan: “she is intrusted with some message for me from her mistress—an appointment for some meeting, which my lady wanted courage to announce herself,” and he looked at the charming girl with the most insinuating look he could assume.

“I should be glad to say two words to you, sir,” stammered the waiting-maid.

“Speak! child. Speak!” said D'Artagnan. “I am listening.”

“Not here, sir: it is impossible. What I have to tell you would take up too long a time, and is, besides, a secret.”

“Well! but what is to be done, then?”

"If you would please to follow me, sir," said Kitty, timidly.

"Wherever you please, my pretty child!"

"Then, follow me."

By the hand which she had continued to hold, Kitty then led D'Artagnan to a small, dark, winding staircase; and, after having made him ascend some fifteen steps, she opened a door.

"Enter, sir; we shall be alone, and may converse here safely."

"And whose room is this, then, my pretty child?" inquired D'Artagnan.

"It is mine, sir; it communicates with that of my mistress, through this door. But you may rely upon it that she will not hear what we may say, for she never goes to bed till midnight."

D'Artagnan threw a glance around him. The little room was a charming model of cleanliness and taste; but his eyes involuntarily turned toward the door which led, as Kitty had told him, to her ladyship's chamber.

Kitty guessed what was passing in the young man's mind, and gave a sigh.

"Then you are very fond of my mistress, sir?" said she.

"Oh, more than I can tell, Kitty. I am mad with love of her!"

Kitty gave a second sigh.

"Alas! sir, it is a great pity!"

"And what the plague do you see to pity in it?"

"Because, sir, my mistress does not love you at all."

"What!" exclaimed D'Artagnan: "did she desire you tell me so?"

"Oh! no, sir, no! But from the interest that I take in you, I have resolved to tell you."

"Thanks, my good Kitty, but only for the intention; for you must own that the information is not agreeable."

"That is to say, you do not believe what I have told you. Is that your meaning?"

"One is always unwilling to believe such things, my charming child, if it were only on account of self-love."

"Then, you do not believe me?"

"I confess that, until you condescend to give me some proof of what you assert——"

"What do you say to this?"

Kitty drew from her bosom a small note.

"For me?" exclaimed D'Artagnan, as he hastily seized the letter.

"No, for another."

"For another?"

"Yes."

"His name! his name!" cried D'Artagnan.

"Look at the address."

"M. le Comte de Wardes."

The remembrance of the scene at St. Germain presented itself at once to the mind of the presumptuous Gascon. By a movement quick as thought, he tore off the envelope, in spite of the cry which Kitty uttered when she saw what he was about to do, or rather, what he had already done.

"Oh, heavens! sir," said she, "what have you done?"

"I? Nothing," said D'Artagnan, and he read as follows:

"You have sent no answer to my first note. Are you, then, in too much suffering, or have you indeed forgotten the glances that you gave me at Madame de Guise's ball? Now is the opportunity, count: do not let it escape you."

D'Artagnan grew pale: he was wounded in his vanity, but he thought himself wounded in his love.

"Poor M. d'Artagnan!" said she, in a voice full of compassion, as she again pressed the young man's hand.

"You pity me, kind child," said D'Artagnan.

"Oh, yes, with all my heart; for I know well what love is myself."

" You know what love is ? " said D'Artagnan, looking at her for the first time with particular attention.

" Alas ! yes."

" Well, instead of pitying me, then, you would be doing better by assisting me to take revenge upon your mistress."

" And what kind of vengeance would you seek ? "

" I would supplant my rival."

" I will not help you in that, sir," said Kitty, quickly.

" And why not ? " inquired D'Artagnan.

" For two reasons."

" Which are ? "

" The first—that my mistress will never love you."

" What can you know about it ? "

" You have offended her too deeply."

" In what can I have offended her—I, who, since I have been acquainted with her, have lived at her feet like a very slave ? Speak, I beseech you ! "

* " I will never avow that except to the man who can read the depths of my soul."

D'Artagnan looked at Kitty for the second time. There was about the young girl a freshness and a beauty which many a duchess would be glad to purchase with her coronet.

" Kitty," said he, " I will read even the very depths of your soul whenever you wish ; so let not that restrain you, my dear child—speak ! " And he gave her a kiss which made the poor child turn as red as a cherry.

" Oh ! no," exclaimed Kitty, " you do not love me ; it is my mistress whom you love ; you have this moment told me so."

" And does that prevent your making known your second reason ? "

" The second reason," said Kitty, encouraged by the kiss and by the expression of the young man's eyes, " is, that in love we should all serve ourselves."

Then only D'Artagnan remembered the languishing glances, the smiles, and stifled sighs of Kitty, when-

ever he chanced to meet her ; whilst, in his absorbing wish to please the titled lady, he had neglected the Abigail. "He who chases the eagle takes no heed of the sparrow."

But our Gascon saw now, at a single glance, all the advantages which he might be able to derive from this passion which Kitty had so unexpectedly avowed—such as the interception of letters to the Count de Wardes, intelligence of everything that occurred, and an entrance at any hour to that chamber which was contiguous to her ladyship's room. In idea, at least, he was already sacrificing the poor young maiden for the possession of her noble mistress.

"Very well," he said to the young girl ; "do you want me to give you, my dear Kitty, a proof of that love which you doubt ?"

"Of what love ?" she asked.

"Of that which I am now ready to feel for you."

"What proof do you mean ?"

"Do you wish me this evening to spend with you the time that I spend usually with your mistress ?"

"Oh, yes !" said Kitty, clapping her hands ; "I do wish it heartily."

"Well, my dear child," said D'Artagnan, establishing himself in an easy chair, "come here while I tell you that you are the prettiest girl I have ever seen."

He said it to her so often, and with such an expression, that the poor child, who wanted so much to believe him, believed him. And yet, to D'Artagnan's great surprise, the pretty Kitty defended herself with considerable resolution.

Time passes rapidly when it is spent in attack and defence.

Midnight at length sounded, and, almost at the same instant, a bell was heard from the adjoining chamber.

"Good Heavens !" exclaimed Kitty, "there is my mistress ringing for me ; go now—go directly !"

D'Artagnan arose, and took his hat as though he intended to obey ; then, opening quickly the door of a large

press, instead of that of the staircase, he squeezed himself within, amidst the robes and night-clothes of her ladyship.

“What are you about?” exclaimed Kitty.

D’Artagnan, who had secured the key beforehand, fastened himself in his press without reply.

“Well!” exclaimed my lady, in a sharp voice, “are you asleep, then, that you do not come when I ring?”

D’Artagnan heard the door of communication opened violently.

“Here I am, my lady, here I am!” exclaimed Kitty springing forward, that she might meet her mistress.

They returned together to the bed-chamber, and as the door continued open, D’Artagnan could hear her ladyship complaining, for a time. At last, however, she became appeased; and, as Kitty waited on her mistress, their conversation turned upon the listener.

“Well?” said my lady, “I have not seen our Gascon here this evening.”

“What, madame,” said Kitty, “has he not been? Can he have proved fickle before he has been favored?”

“Oh, no! he must have been hindered either by M. de Treville or M. des Essarts. I have some experience, Kitty, and I hold that man securely.”

“What will your ladyship do with him?”

“What shall I do with him? Depend upon it, Kitty, there is something between that man and me of which he little thinks. He very nearly destroyed my credit with His Eminence. Oh! I will have vengeance!”

“I thought that your ladyship loved him?”

“Love him! I detest him. The ninny held Lord de Winter’s life in his power, and did not kill him! and, by that alone, he made me lose an income of three hundred thousand francs.”

“It is true,” said Kitty, “your son was the sole heir of his uncle, and, till he became of age, you would have had the advantage of the fortune.”

D’Artagnan shuddered to the very marrow of his bones

at hearing this sweet creature censuring him, in that voice whose sharpness she had so much trouble to conceal in conversation, for not having slain a man on whom he had seen her heaping indications of affection.

"Yes," continued her ladyship, "and I would have taken vengeance on him before now, if, for some reason or other, that I know not, the cardinal had not insisted on forbearance."

"Oh, yes: but your ladyship had no forbearance with that little woman that he loved."

"What! the mercer's wife of the Rue des Fossoyeurs! Why, has he not already forgotten her existence! A fine vengeance that was, truly."

Cold drops trickled on the brow of D'Artagnan; this titled lady was a very monster.

He set himself again to listen, but the toilet was, unfortunately, ended.

"That will do," said her ladyship; "go to your own room now, and try, to-morrow, to get me an answer at last to that letter which I have given you."

"For M. de Wardes?" said Kitty.

"Certainly, for M. de Wardes."

"Ah!" said Kitty, "he is one that seems to me in a very different frame of mind from that poor M. d'Artagnan."

"Leave me, girl," exclaimed her ladyship; "I do not like remarks."

D'Artagnan heard the noise of the closing door, and then of two bolts with which "My Lady" secured herself within. Kitty, on her side, turned the key in the lock as gently as it was possible. D'Artagnan then pushed open the door of the press.

"Oh! my God!" whispered Kitty, "what ails you? what makes you look so pale?"

"The abominable wretch!" muttered D'Artagnan.

"Silence! silence! Go away," said Kitty: "there is only a partition between my room and my lady's; and everything that is said in one is heard in the other."

"For precisely that reason I will not go," said D'Artagnan.

"What do you mean?" said Kitty, blushing.

"Or, rather, I will go—later;" and he drew Kitty to him. There was no possibility of resistance; it would have made so much noise! So Kitty did not resist.

It was a sort of vengeance on "My Lady," and D'Artagnan found that they are right who say that vengeance is a pleasure for the gods. So, had he been a man of heart, he would have been pleased with this new conquest; but D'Artagnan was ruled by pride and ambition.

However, it must be said, to D'Artagnan's credit, that the first use he made of his influence over Kitty was to try to learn from her what had become of Madame Bonacieux; but the poor girl swore to D'Artagnan upon the crucifix, that she was completely ignorant regarding the matter, as her mistress never allowed her to know more than half of any of her secrets. But she thought he might rely upon it that she was not dead.

Nor did Kitty really know anything further about the circumstance which had nearly made her mistress lose her credit with the cardinal. But in this particular, D'Artagnan was better informed. As he had perceived her ladyship on shipboard, at the very moment that he was quitting England, he did not doubt that it had some reference to the diamond studs.

But what was most manifest in the whole affair, was the genuine, deep, inveterate hatred which her ladyship entertained against him, for not having killed her brother-in-law.

D'Artagnan returned to her ladyship's on the next day. He found her in a very ill humor, and he understood that it was the disappointment of an answer from De Wardes which thus provoked her. Kitty entered but "My Lady" treated her harshly. A glance which she gave at D'Artagnan seemed to say—"See what I suffer upon your account."

But, as the evening wore on, the lovely lioness grew

gentle. She listened with a smile to the tender compliments of D'Artagnan, and condescended even to give him her hand to kiss.

D'Artagnan left her, scarcely knowing what to think. But, as he was a Gascon, who was not easily to be deceived, he had in his mind contrived a little plan.

He found Kitty at the door, and went, as on the evening before, to her room, to collect intelligence. Kitty had been sadly scolded, and accused of negligence. Her ladyship could not comprehend the silence of the Count de Wardes, and had commanded her maid to come to her at nine o'clock the next morning for a third letter.

D'Artagnan made Kitty promise to come to him in the morning, and bring that letter to him. The girl promised all that D'Artagnan desired : she was crazed.

Everything passed as on the preceding night.

D'Artagnan concealed himself. "My Lady" called, disrobed, sent Kitty away, and closed the door. As on the preceding night, D'Artagnan did not depart till five in the mornir.

At eleven o'clock, he saw Kitty make her appearance. She held in her hand another note from her ladyship. On this occasion the poor girl did not even endeavor to detain it from D'Artagnan : she let him do as he chose ; in body and in soul, she belonged to her handsome soldier.

D'Artagnan opened this second note, which, like the other, bore neither signature nor address, and read as follows :

"This is the third time I have written to tell you I love you : take care that I do not write a fourth time, to tell you that I hate you. If you are sorry for the way you have treated me, the young girl who brings this letter will tell you how a gallant man may obtain forgiveness."

D'Artagnan's color changed several times, as he perused this note.

"Oh ! you love her still !" said Kitty, whose eyes had never once been turned away from the young man's face.

"No, Kitty, you deceive yourself. I no longer love her, but I want to avenge myself for her contempt."

"Yes ; I know your vengeance ! You told me."

"What does it matter, Kitty ? You know I love you only."

"How can I be sure of that ?"

"By the disdain I will cast upon her."

Kitty sighed.

D'Artagnan took up a pen, and wrote :

"MADAME,—Until now I have been in doubt whether your former notes could really have been meant for me, so unworthy did I feel myself of such an honor ; but, to-day, I must at least believe in the excess of your kindness, since not only your letter, but your servant also, affirm that I have the happiness to be the object of your love.

"She has no need to tell me how a gallant man may obtain forgiveness. At eleven to-night I shall come to implore your forgiveness. To delay another day, at present, would be, in my opinion, to offer you a new affront.

"He whom you have rendered the happiest of men."

This note was not precisely a forgery, as D'Artagnan did not sign it, but it was an indelicacy ; it was even, according to the standard of our present manners, something like an act of infamy ; but people in those days were less scrupulous than we are now. Moreover, D'Artagnan knew, from her ladyship's own avowal, that she had been guilty of treacheries in the most important affairs, and his respect for her was singularly small. And yet, little as he respected her, he felt an ungovernable passion for the woman. Passion drunk with contempt ; but passion or thirst, as one chooses to call it.

D'Artagnan's plot was very simple. Through Kitty's

chamber he would enter that of her mistress. He would profit by the first moment of surprise, of shame, of terror, to triumph over her. Perhaps he might not succeed, but he must leave it to chance. In eight days the campaign would open, and he must leave then. D'Artagnan had no time to procrastinate.

"There," said the young man, handing the sealed note to Kitty, "give this letter to her ladyship; it is M. de Wardes' reply."

Poor Kitty became as white as a lily; she suspected what the note contained.

"Listen, my dear child," said D'Artagnan; "you understand that all this must come to an end in one way or another. Your mistress may discover that you delivered the first note to my servant, instead of to the count's; and that it was I who unsealed the others, which should have been opened by M. de Wardes. Her ladyship will then dismiss you, and you know that she is not the kind of woman to be moderate in her revenge."

"Alas!" said Kitty, "why have I exposed myself to this?"

"For me, I know, my beauty," said the young man, "and very grateful am I for it, I swear."

"But what does your note contain?"

"Her ladyship will tell you."

"Alas! you do not love me!" exclaimed Kitty, "and I am very wretched!"

To this reproach there is always an answer to delude a woman. D'Artagnan answered in a way that kept Kitty in error.

Kitty wept much before she determined to deliver this letter to her mistress; but, from devotion to the young soldier, she did determine at last, and that was all that D'Artagnan desired.

At last he promised to leave her mistress early in the evening and come to her.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CONCERNING THE EQUIPMENTS OF ARAMIS AND PORTHOS.

WHILST the four friends were busily engaged in looking out for their equipments, there had no longer been any regular meetings among them. They dined, without one another, wherever they chanced to be, and met together when they could. Duty also, on its side, occupied a part of that precious time which was so rapidly passing away. But they had agreed to meet once a week, about one o'clock, at Athos's chambers, as it was known that he, according to his vow, would never pass over the threshold of his door.

The very day on which Kitty had visited D'Artagnan at his own home was one of their days of meeting ; and scarcely had the waiting-maid quitted D'Artagnan, before he proceeded to the Rue Ferou.

He found Athos and Aramis philosophizing. Aramis had still a secret inclination to return to the cassock ; and Athos, according to his custom, neither dissuaded nor encouraged him. Athos liked every one to exercise his own free-will.

He never gave his advice before it was asked for, and, even then, it must be asked for twice.

" In general, people only ask for advice," he said, " that they may not follow it ; or, if they should follow it, that they may have somebody to blame for having given it."

Parthos arrived an instant after D'Artagnan ; so the four friends were all assembled.

Their four countenances had four different expressions : that of Porthos, tranquillity ; of D'Artagnan, hope ; of Aramis, anxiety ; and that of Athos, utter indifference.

After a moment's conversation, in which Porthos obscurely intimated that a lady high in rank had kindly taken upon herself to relieve him from his embarrassment, Musqueton entered.

He came to request Porthos to come to his lodging, where—said he, in a most melancholy tone—his presence was most urgently required.

“Are my equipments come ?” demanded Porthos.

“Yes and no,” replied Musqueton.

“But what do you mean, I ask you ?”

“Come, sir !”

Porthos arose, bowed to his friends, and followed Musqueton.

A moment afterwards, Bazin appeared on the door sill.

“What do you want, my friend ?” inquired Aramis with that softness of tone which was always observable in him, when his ideas inclined toward the church.

“A man is waiting you, sir, at your rooms,” replied Bazin

“A man ? What sort of a man ?”

“A beggar.”

“Give him something, Bazin, and tell him to pray for a poor sinner.”

“This beggar-man insists on seeing you, and wishes to make out that you will be very glad to see *him*.”

“Has he got anything particular for me ?”

“Yes. ‘If M. Aramis hesitates to come to me,’ said he, ‘tell him I have just arrived from Tours.’”

“From Tours ! I will go directly !” exclaimed Aramis. “Gentlemen, a thousand pardons : but undoubtedly this man brings me the news I was expecting.”

And getting up at once, he went off at a run.

There now remained only Athos and D'Artagnan.

"I verily believe that those fellows have settled their affairs," said Athos. "What think you about it, D'Artagnan?"

"I knew that Porthos was in a fair way, and as for Aramis, to tell the truth, I was never very uneasy about him. But you, my dear Athos, who so generously gave away the English pistoles which were your legitimate property—what will you do?"

"I am very glad that I killed the rascal," said Athos, "seeing that he had the silly curiosity to know my real name; but if I had pocketed his pistoles, they would have weighed me down with remorse."

"Well, my dear Athos, you really have an inconceivable delicacy," said D'Artagnan.

"Enough! enough! But what was M. de Treville saying, when he did me the honor to call and see me yesterday—that you haunt these suspicious English people, whom the cardinal protects?"

"That is to say, that I visit an Englishwoman—the lady of whom I told you."

"Ah, yes, the fair woman, about whom I gave you some advice, which, naturally enough, you took especial care *not* to follow."

"I gave you my reasons. But I am now certain that My Lady had something to do with the disappearance of Madame Bonancieux."

"Yes, I comprehend: to find one woman, you make love to another. It is the longest way, but by far the most amusing."

D'Artagnan was about to unbosom himself to Athos, but one reason restrained him. Athos was a gentleman scrupulous on points of honor, and in the plan he had made for "My Lady" he was sure he could not obtain Athos' assent. He was therefore silent.

We will now leave the two friends, who had nothing very important to say to one another, and follow Aramis.

On entering his room he found a little man with intelligent eyes, but dressed in rags.

“Is it you who want to see me?” said the musketeer.

“I am in search of M. Aramis; is that the name that you are called by?”

“Yes. Have you anything for me?”

“Yes, if you can show me a certain embroidered handkerchief.”

“Here it is,” said Aramis, taking a key from his bosom, and opening a small ebony casket, inlaid with mother-of-pearl. “Here it is. Look!”

“That is right,” said the beggar; “now dismiss your servant.”

For, in fact, Bazin, curious to know what the beggar wanted with his master, had kept pace with him, and arrived almost at the same time. But his speed was of little benefit to him. At the suggestion of the beggar, his master made a sign to him to withdraw, and he had no alternative but to obey.

When Bazin was gone, the beggar glanced rapidly around, to be sure that nobody could either see or hear him, and then, opening his ragged vest, which was intermittently held together by a leathern belt, he began to rip the top of his doublet, from which he drew a letter.

Aramis uttered a cry of joy at the sight of the seal, kissed the writing, and, with a respect almost religious, opened the letter, which contained what follows:

“**M**Y FRIEND,—Fate wills that we be separated for a little longer time, but the bright days of youth are not forever lost. Do your duty in the camp; I will do mine elsewhere. Take what the bearer will give you; make the campaign like a good and graceful gentleman; and always remember me, who kiss tenderly your black eyes.

“Farewell, until we meet again.”

The beggar was yet engaged in ripping ; he drew from his dirty clothes, one by one, a hundred and fifty double Spanish pistoles, which he placed in a row upon the table ; then he opened the door, bowed, and was gone before the astonished young man had dared to address a word to him.

Aramis now re-perused the letter, and perceived that it had the following postscript :

“P. S.—You can be hospitable to the bearer, who is a count, and a grandee of Spain.”

“Golden dreams ! ” exclaimed Aramis ; “oh ! heavenly life ! yes, we are still young ! yes, we shall still bask in brighter days ! Oh ! thou art my love, my life-blood, my being ! All in all, art thou, my beautiful beloved ! ”

And he kissed the letter passionately without even glancing at the gold which glittered on the table.

Bazin was scratching at the door, and, as Aramis had now no reason for keeping him away, he permitted him to come in.

He was astounded at the sight of so much gold, and forgot that he should have announced D'Artagnan, who, curious to know what this beggar-man was, had come on to Aramis, when he left Athos.

But D'Artagnan never stood on ceremony with Aramis ; and therefore, seeing that Bazin had forgotten to announce him he announced himself.

“Ah, the deuce ! my dear Aramis,” said he on entering, “these are the plums they send you from Tours : you must send my congratulations on them to the gardener who gathers them.”

“You are mistaken, my dear fellow,” said the ever discreet Aramis ; “it is my bookseller, who has just sent me the price of my poem, in verses of one syllable, which I began down in the country.”

“ Ah ! really ? ” said D’Artagnan. “ Well, all I can say, my dear Aramis, is, that your bookseller is very generous.”

“ What, sir,” said Bazin, “ does a poem sell for such a sum ? It is inconceivable ! Oh, sir, you must do whatever you desire ; you may become equal to M. Voiture and M. de Benserade. I like that now, myself. A poet ! It is next door to an abbé. Ah, sir, establish yourself, then, as a poet, I beseech you ! ”

“ Bazin, my friend,” said Aramis, “ I think that you are interposing in the conversation.”

The valet understood that he was wrong, bowed his head, and left the room.

“ Ah ! ” said D’Artagnan, with a smile, “ you sell your productions for their weight in gold ! You are fortunate, my friend ! But take care, or you will lose that letter, which is falling out of your coat, and which, without doubt, is also from your bookseller.”

Aramis blushed to the very white of his eyes, thrust in the letter, and buttoned up his doublet.

“ My dear D’Artagnan,” said he, “ we will, if you please, go to our friends : and, as I am now so rich, we will begin to dine together again, till you become, in turn, rich yourselves.”

“ Faith, and with great pleasure,” replied D’Artagnan. “ It is a long time since we have had a suitable dinner ; and as I have myself rather a hazardous expedition this evening, I shall not be sorry, I confess, to have the fumes of two or three bottles of old Burgundy mounting up into my head.”

“ Well, as for old Burgundy, I do not hate it myself, either,” said Aramis, out of whose head the sight of the gold had driven all thoughts of retirement.

And, having put three or four double pistoles into his pocket for present use, he inclosed the remainder in the

ebony casket, incrusted with pearl, which already contained the famous handkerchief that had served him in lieu of talisman.

The two friends went first to Athos, who, faithful to his vow not to go from home, undertook to have the dinner brought to his own rooms. As he was marvelously familiar with all gastronomical details, D'Artagnan and Aramis had no scruples in confiding to him this important matter.

They then went to Porthos; but at the corner of the Rue du Bac, they met Musqueton, who with a most piteous face, was driving a mule and a horse before him.

D'Artagnan uttered an exclamation of surprise, not unmingled with joy.

"Ah! my yellow horse!" cried he. "Aramis, behold this horse!"

"Oh, what a frightful beast!" exclaimed Aramis.

"Well, my dear boy, it is the horse on which I came to Paris."

"What, sir, do you know the animal?" inquired Musqueton.

"He certainly is of a most original color," said Aramis. "I never saw one with such a hide before."

"I can well believe it," replied D'Artagnan; "and I sold him for three crowns, which must have been for his hide, for certainly the carcass is not worth eighteen livres. But how do I find this horse in your hands, Musqueton?"

"Ah!" said the valet, "do not say anything about it, sir. It is a horrible trick of our duchess's husband."

"How so?"

"Yes, we are looked upon most favorably, by a woman of quality, the Duchess of —. But excuse me, my master has enjoined me to be discreet. She obliged us to accept a small memorial, a magnificent Spanish

charger, and an Andalusian mule, which were most marvelous to behold. But the husband found it out, abstracted on their way the two magnificent animals, and substituted these frightful beasts for them."

"And are you taking them back to him?"

"Yes, that is it, exactly, sir," replied Musqueton. "You know it is impossible for us to accept such scarecrows as these instead of those which had been promised us."

"No, egad! though I should have enjoyed seeing Porthos on my yellow horse. It would have given me some idea of what I looked like myself when I came to Paris. But do not let us detain you, Musqueton. Go and execute your master's commission, go. Is he at home?"

"Yes, sir," said Musqueton, "but in a very bad humor."

He then continued on his way toward the quay of the Grande Augustins, whilst the two friends went to ring at the unfortunate Porthos's door. But the latter had seen them crossing the court, and was careful not to let them in. So their ringing was in vain.

In the meantime, Musqueton proceeded on, and crossing the Pont Neuf—still driving the two sorry beasts before him—he reached the Rue aux Ours, where, in accordance with his master's orders, he fastened the horse and the mule to the knocker of the attorney's door; and then, without disturbing himself about their future fate, he returned to find Porthos, and inform him that his commission had been punctually executed.

After some time, the two unhappy beasts, having eaten nothing since the morning, made so great a noise by lifting up and letting fall the knocker, that the attorney ordered his stump-in-the-gutter to inquire in the neighborhood to whom this horse and mule belonged.

Madame Coquenard recognized her present, and could not, at first, at all comprehend such a restitution. But a visit from Porthos soon enlightened her. The rage which, in spite of the constraint that he imposed upon himself, sparkled in the musketeer's eyes, alarmed his susceptible admirer. In fact, Musqueton had not concealed from his master that he had met D'Artagnan and Aramis; and that the former had recognized, in the yellow horse, the very Béarnese nag on which he had arrived at Paris, and which he had sold for three crowns.

Porthos left again, as soon as he had made an appointment to meet the attorney's wife in the Cloister of St. Magloire. When her husband saw that Porthos was leaving, he invited him to dinner—an invitation which the musketeer declined with an air of majestic dignity.

Madame Coquenard trembled as she went toward the Cloister St. Magloire; for she anticipated the reproaches that awaited her. But she was fascinated by the lofty manners of Porthos.

All the imprecations and reproaches that a man, whose vanity is wounded, can pour upon a woman, were poured by Porthos on the humble head of the attorney's wife.

"Alas!" said she, "I did it all for the best. One of our clients is a horse-dealer; he owed us money, and was manifestly reluctant to pay; so I took this mule and horse in discharge of his debt. But he had promised me two royal animals."

"Well, madame," said Porthos "if his debt was more than five crowns, your horse-dealer is a thief."

"It is not forbidden one to look out for a good bargain, M. Porthos," said the attorney's wife by way of excuse.

"No, madame: but those who look out for good bargains ought to permit others to look out for more generous friends."

And, turning on his heel, Porthos, made a step toward retiring.

“M. Porthos! M. Porthos!” exclaimed the attorney’s wife. “I confess that it was wrong; I ought not to have thought of bargaining about the equipment of a gentleman like you.”

Without replying, Porthos took a second step to leave.

The attorney’s wife fancied that she saw him in a glittering sphere, encompassed by duchesses and marchionesses, who scattered bags of gold before his feet.

“Stay! in Heaven’s name, stay, M. Porthos!” exclaimed she: “stay, and let us talk it all over.”

“To talk with you brings me ill-luck,” said Porthos.

“But, tell me, what do you require?”

“Nothing: for that amounts to the same thing as though I required something of you.”

The attorney’s wife hung on Porthos’s arm, and, in the violence of her grief, exclaimed:

“M. Porthos, I am completely ignorant about all these things. What can I know about a horse! What do I know about equipments!”

“You should leave it to me, then, who do understand them, madame. But you wanted to get things cheap, that you might lend at usury.”

“It was wrong, M. Porthos; and I will give you reparation, on my word of honor.”

“And how so?” demanded the musketeer.

“Listen. M. Coquenard is going this evening to the Duke de Chaulnes, who has sent for him. It is to a consultation which will last at least two hours. Come, then; we shall be alone, and arrange the business.”

“Well: that is much more to the point.”

“And you will forgive me?”

“We shall see,” replied Porthos, majestically.

They parted from each other, repeating: "Till this evening!"

"I' faith!" thought Porthos, as he went his way, "I seem now to be creeping a step or two nearer M. Coquenard's strong-box."

CHAPTER XXXV.

ALL CATS ARE THE SAME COLOR IN THE DARK.

THE evening so impatiently awaited by D'Artagnan at length arrived.

At about nine o'clock he went, as usual, to her ladyship's, and as he found her in a wonderfully good humor, he was received more sweetly than ever. Our Gascon saw at the first glance that the pretended note of the Count de Wardes had been delivered by Kitty to her mistress, and that it was producing its effect.

Kitty came in with some sherbets. Her mistress looked at her kindly, and smiled on her with her most gracious smile; but the poor girl was so concerned at the presence of D'Artagnan with her ladyship, that she was insensible to the latter's good-will.

D'Artagnan looked by turns at these two women, and could not but confess that nature had committed a mistake in molding them; to the great lady^{*} she had given a venial and perfidious soul; and, to the waiting maid, a loving and devoted heart.

At ten o'clock her ladyship began to appear uneasy, and D'Artagnan soon guessed the meaning of her trouble. She looked at the time-piece, got up, sat down again, and smiled at D'Artagnan, with a look which seemed to say; "You are very amiable, no doubt, but you would be still more charming if you would but go."

D'Artagnan arose and took his hat, and then her ladyship gave him her hand to kiss. The young man was

sensible of a gentle pressure, which he attributed, not to coquetry, but to gratitude on account of his departure.

"She loves him madly!" muttered he, as he went out.

On this occasion Kitty was not awaiting him, either in the ante-chamber, in the corridor, or at the gate; and D'Artagnan had to find out, alone, the staircase and the little chamber.

Kitty was sitting with her face between her hands, crying. She heard D'Artagnan enter, but did not lift up her head. The young man went to her and took her hands, and then she burst out in sobs.

As D'Artagnan had suspected, her ladyship, on receiving the letter which she regarded as the Count de Wardes's reply, had, in the delirium of her joy, made her waiting-maid acquainted with the whole, and then, as a recompense for the manner in which her mission had been executed, had given her a purse of gold.

Kitty, on returning to her room, had thrown the purse into a corner, where it was lying open, disgorging three or four golden coins upon the carpet.

When at last the poor girl, at D'Artagnan's entreaty, raised her head, he was struck with alarm at the expression of her face. She clasped her hands together with a suppliant air, but without venturing to speak a word.

Little sensible as was D'Artagnan's heart, he was yet affected by this silent grief. But he was too positive in all his projects, and especially in this one, to deviate at all from his ordained arrangement. He would not give Kitty the least hope of deferring the rash enterprise on which he had resolved; but he represented it to her as what it really was—that is, as an act of simple vengeance against her ladyship's coquetry; and as the only means which he possessed of obtaining, from her dread of the scandal of exposure, the information that he wanted in respect to Madame Bonancieux.

This plan became, also, the more easy in its execution, from her ladyship having, doubtless to hide her blushes from her lover, commanded Kitty to extinguish all the lights in her apartment. M. de Wardes would depart before day, while it was yet dark.

An instant afterward, her ladyship was heard returning to her chamber. D'Artagnan immediately hurried within his press. Scarcely was he blockaded in it, before the bell rung.

Kitty went to her mistress, and did not leave the door open; but the partition was so thin that the conversation of the two women was almost wholly audible.

Her ladyship seemed to be intoxicated with joy. She made Kitty repeat to her the most trifling details of her pretended interview with De Wardes, and tell her how he had received her letter, and how he answered it; what was the expression of his face, and whether he seemed much enamored: and, to all those questions, poor Kitty, who was compelled to keep up the comedy, answered in a stifled voice, of which her mistress, so egotistical is happiness, did not even observe the disconsolate tone.

As the hour of her interview with the count approached, her ladyship had all the lights in her own room actually extinguished, and commanded Kitty to return to her chamber, and to introduce De Wardes as soon as he arrived.

Kitty had not long to wait. Hardly had D'Artagnan seen, through the key-hole of his press, that the whole apartment was in darkness, before he sprang from his cupboard, at the very moment that Kitty closed the communicating door.

"What is that noise?" inquired my lady.

"It is I," whispered D'Artagnan—"I, the Count de Wardes."

"Oh, my God! my God!" groaned Kitty, "he could not even wait for the hour himself had fixed."

"Well!" said the lady, in a trembling voice, "why does he not come in? Count, count," added she, "you know that I am waiting for you."

At this appeal, D'Artagnan put Kitty gently aside, and sprang into her ladyship's room.

What rage and grief must torture the soul of the lover who receives, under a name that is not his own, protestations of affection which address themselves to his favored rival!

D'Artagnan was in a situation of which he had not calculated the suffering; jealousy was gnawing at his heart; and he had to endure almost as much as poor Kitty, who was at that very time weeping in the adjoining chamber.

"Yes, count," said her ladyship, in her sweetest tones, as she tenderly pressed one of his hands between her own; "yes, I am happy in the love which your looks, and words expressed whenever we have met. And I, too, return your love. Ah! to-morrow you must let me have some keepsake, which will prove you think of me; and, as you might forget me, count, keep this."

And she slipped a ring from her own finger on to that of D'Artagnan.

It was a magnificent sapphire, encircled by diamonds.

The first emotion of D'Artagnan prompted him to return it; but her ladyship added:

"No, no: keep this ring for love of me. Besides," added she, in a voice of much emotion, "you really do me a far greater service by accepting it than you can possibly imagine."

"This woman is full of mystery," thought D'Artagnan.

He felt himself at this moment ready to confess everything. He had, in fact, already opened his mouth to tell

her ladyship who he was, and with what desire of vengeance he had come, when she added :

“ Poor angel ! whom that monster of a Gascon almost killed.”

The monster was himself.

“ Oh ! ” continued her ladyship, “ do you still suffer from your wounds ? ”

“ Yes, greatly,” answered D’Artagnan, who was somewhat at a loss what to say.

“ Depend upon it,” muttered her ladyship, in a tone which gave but little comfort to her hearer, “ that I will take a terrible vengeance on him for your sufferings.”

“ Egad ! ” said D’Artagnan to himself, “ the time for my confession is not come yet.”

It required some little time for D’Artagnan to recover himself from this little dialogue. All the ideas of vengeance which he had brought with him had completely vanished. This woman exercised an inconceivable power over him : he hated and adored her at the same time. Never had he believed that two sentiments so inconsistent could exist together in the same heart, creating, by commingling, a strange, and, in some respects, a diabolical love.

But the clock had struck one, and it was time for them to separate. At the moment of quitting her ladyship D’Artagnan was only sensible of a deep regret at being parted from her ; and in the passionate adieu which they reciprocally addressed to one another, a new meeting was agreed upon in the ensuing week.

Poor Kitty hoped to have an opportunity of saying a few words to D’Artagnan as he passed through her chamber, but her mistress led him out herself in the darkness, and only left him when they reached the staircase.

In the morning of the next day, D’Artagnan hastened

to Athos ; for, being engaged in such a singular adventure, he wished for his advice. He told him everything ; and Athos's brow was often knitted during the narration.

" Your lady," said he, " appears to me to be an infamous creature ; but you are not, on that account, the less wrong in thus deceiving her. You may now be sure that, in one way or another, you will have a bitter enemy to deal with."

Whilst still speaking, Athos looked earnestly at the sapphire, encircled with diamonds, which D'Artagnan now wore in the place of the queen's ring, which was carefully deposited in a case.

" You are looking at this ring ? " said the Gascon, proud of displaying before his friend such a splendid gift.

" Yes," replied Athos ; " it reminds me of a family jewel."

" It is beautiful, is it not ? " said D'Artagnan.

" Magnificent ! " rejoined Athos. " I did not believe that there were two sapphires in the world of so fine a water. Did you exchange your diamond for it ? "

" No," replied D'Artagnan ; " it is a present from my beautiful Englishwoman, or, rather, my beautiful Frenchwoman, for, although I have not asked her, I am sure she was born in France."

" And this ring was given to you by her ladyship," said Athos, in a voice in which it was easy to perceive extreme emotion.

" Yes, by herself ; she gave it to me last night."

" Let me look at it," said Athos.

" Here it is," said D'Artagnan, drawing it from his finger.

Athos examined it, and became very pale ; he then tried it on the ring-finger of his left hand, and it fitted as if it had been made for him.

A shade of anger and revenge passed across his generally calm forehead.

"It is impossible that it can be the same," said he. "How could this ring come into the hands of that lady? And yet it is very strange that two jewels should be so wondrously alike."

"Do you know the ring?" asked D'Artagnan.

"I thought I recognized it," said Athos, "but I dare say I am mistaken."

He then returned the ring to D'Artagnan, without, however, ceasing to keep his eyes upon it.

"Let me entreat you," said he, an instant afterward, "either to take that ring from your finger, or to turn the stone inside; it recalls to me such painful remembrances, that I should not be collected enough for any conversation. Did you not come to ask my advice? did you not say that you were in a difficulty what to do? But stop, let me look at that sapphire again. The one I mentioned had one of its surfaces scratched by an accident."

D'Artagnan again drew off the ring, and handed it to Athos.

Athos trembled.

"Look," said he, "look. Is it not strange?" And he pointed out to D'Artagnan the scratch that he remembered should be there.

"But whence came this sapphire, Athos?"

"It was my mother's, who had received it from her mother. As I told you, it is an ancient jewel, which ought never to have left the family."

"And you—sold it?" demanded D'Artagnan, with some hesitation.

"No," replied Athos, with a singular smile, "I gave it away, during a moment of love, as it was given to you."

D'Artagnan grew pensive in his turn. He thought

that he could discern, in her ladyship's life, abysses that seemed more dark and terrible than ever.

He put the ring, not on his finger, but into his pocket.

"Listen," said Athos, taking the young man's hand. "You know how much I love you, D'Artagnan. Had I a son, I could not love him more dearly. Well, take my advice—renounce this woman. I do not know her, but a kind of intuition tells me that she is a lost creature, and that there is something deadly in her."

"You are right," said D'Artagnan, "and I *will* renounce her. I will confess that this woman frightens even me."

"And will you have the resolution?" asked Athos.

"Yes; and at once, too," replied D'Artagnan.

"You are quite right, my dear D'Artagnan," said Athos, pressing his hand with an affection almost paternal; "and God grant that this woman, who has scarcely been a part of your existence, may leave no pestilential trace upon it!"

And Athos bowed his head, like a man who would not be sorry to be left to his own thoughts.

On reaching home D'Artagnan found Kitty awaiting him. A month of fever could not have made a greater change in the poor girl than had been produced by an hour of jealousy and grief.

She had been sent by her mistress to the Count de Wardes. Her mistress was mad with love—intoxicated with joy: she wanted to know when the count would accord her a second interview.

The pale and trembling Kitty waited there for D'Artagnan's reply.

Athos had considerable influence over the young man. The counsels of his friend, co-operating with the sentiments of his own heart, and with the memory of Madame Bonancieux, which was but rarely absent from him, had made him resolve, now that his pride was satisfied, to see

her ladyship no more. As his only answer, he took a pen and wrote the following letter :

“Do not reckon any more on me, madame. Now that I am becoming convalescent, I have so many interviews of the same kind to grant that I must put them into some regular order. When your turn comes round, I shall have the honor to inform you. I kiss your hands.

“*COMTE DE WARDES.*”

Not a word said about the sapphire; the Gascon wished to keep it for the present, as a weapon against her ladyship.

It would be wrong to judge of the actions of one age by the habits of another. Conduct which would now be regarded as a disgrace to a gallant man seemed, at that time, quite simple and natural. And younger sons of the best families were often supported by their mistresses.

D'Artagnan handed the open letter to Kitty, who read it at first without understanding it, and who very nearly went out of her mind when she read it a second time.

Kitty scarcely could believe such happiness; and D'Artagnan was obliged to repeat to her verbally the assurance which the letter gave in writing. Whatever might be the danger which, on account of the passionate character of her mistress, the poor girl incurred in delivering such a note to her ladyship, none the less did she run back, as fast as her legs could carry her, to the Place Royale.

The heart of the kindest woman is pitiless toward a rival's pains.

Her ladyship opened the letter with an eagerness equal to that with which the Abigail had brought it; but at the first words that she read, she became actually livid; then, she crushed the letter in her hand, and turned, with lightning in her eyes, on Kitty.

“ What is this letter ? ” said she.

“ It is the answer to your ladyship’s,” said the trembling Kitty.

“ Impossible ! ” exclaimed the lady : “ impossible, that a gentleman should have written such a letter to a lady ! ”

Then, suddenly, she cried :

“ My God ! could he know——”

She checked herself, shuddering. She ground her teeth —her face was of an ashy color. She endeavored to take a step toward the window for air, but she could only stretch out her arms : her strength failed her, and she sunk back into an easy-chair.

Kitty, thinking she was fainting, rushed forward to open her corset. But, raising herself up suddenly, she exclaimed :

“ What do you want ? why do you touch me ? ”

“ I thought your ladyship was ill, and I wished to assist you,” replied the poor damsels, frightened at the terrible expression which the countenance of her mistress had assumed.

“ *I* unwell ! Do you take me for a weak woman ! When I am insulted, I do not fall ill—I seek for my revenge. Do you hear ? ”

And she motioned Kitty to leave the room.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE DREAM OF VENGEANCE.

In the evening, her ladyship gave orders that M. d'Artagnan should be admitted as usual, as soon as he came. But he came not.

On the next morning Kitty went again to see D'Artagnan, and told him all that had occurred on the previous day. D'Artagnan smiled. This jealous anger of her ladyship was his revenge.

The impatience of the indignant lady had increased by night. She renewed her orders relative to the young Gascon; but, as on the preceding evening, her expectations were in vain.

On the next morning Kitty visited D'Artagnan. She was, however, no longer joyous and alert, as on the previous days, but, on the contrary, overcome with grief.

D'Artagnan inquired of the poor girl what ailed her; but the latter, as her sole reply, drew from her pocket a letter, which she handed to him.

This letter was in her ladyship's handwriting; only on this occasion it was really destined for D'Artagnan, and not for M. de Wardes.

He opened it, and read as follows:

"DEAR M. D'ARTAGNAN,—It is wrong thus to neglect your friends, especially when about to part for so long a time. I and my brother looked for you in vain, both yesterday and the day before. Will it be the same this evening?"

"This is all very plain," said D'Artagnan, "and I expected this letter. My credit rises as that of the Count de Wardes falls."

"And will you go?" asked Kitty.

"Listen, my dear child," replied the Gascon, who sought to excuse himself in his own eyes for failing to keep his promise to Athos. "You must see that it would be imprudent to refuse so positive an invitation. Her ladyship, seeing that I kept away, would wonder at the cessation of my visits, and might perhaps suspect something. Who can tell the limits of such a woman's vengeance?"

"Oh, my God" exclaimed Kitty, "you know how to represent things in such a way that you are always right. But you will go and pay your court to her again; and if you should happen to please her now, with your own face and under your true name, it will be even far worse than before!"

The poor girl guessed by instinct, a part of what was about to occur.

D'Artagnan comforted her as well as he was able, and promised her that he would remain insensible to her ladyship's seductions.

He sent word, by way of answer, that he was as grateful as man could be for her ladyship's kindness, and that he would not fail to wait upon her as she commanded; but he did not venture to write to her, lest, to her experienced eyes, he should be unable to sufficiently disguise his handwriting.

By nine o'clock D'Artagnan was at the Place Royale. It was obvious that the servants, who were waiting in the ante-chamber, had received their orders; for as soon as he had appeared, before he had even inquired if her ladyship was to be seen, one of them hastened to announce him.

“Show him in,” said the lady, in a voice so piercing that he heard it in the ante-chamber.

He was at once admitted.

“Not at home to anybody,” said her ladyship; “do you hear? Not to anybody.”

D’Artagnan observed the lady with great curiosity. She was pale, and her eyes were heavy, either from weeping or from want of sleep. The customary lights in the room had been designedly diminished in number; and yet the woman could not conceal the traces of the fever which had been consuming her for two days. D’Artagnan approached her with his usual gallantry, and she made a mighty effort to receive him, but never did a more agitated face belie a more enchanting smile.

To D’Artagnan’s questions respecting her health, she replied:

“Bad, very bad.”

“Then,” said D’Artagnan, “I am indiscreet in coming; you are unquestionably in want of a little quiet, and I will immediately retire.”

“No,” said her ladyship, “remain, M. d’Artagnan. Your pleasing company will, on the contrary, give me great relief.”

“She has never spoken to me so charmingly before,” thought D’Artagnan; “let me be upon my guard.”

Her ladyship assumed the most affectionate air possible, and gave her utmost charm to her conversation. At the same time that fever, which had for a moment left her, returned, to restore the luster to her eyes, the color to her cheeks, and the carmine to her lips. D’Artagnan again saw the Circe who had already encompassed him with her enchantments. Her ladyship smiled, and D’Artagnan felt that he would dare perdition for that smile.

There was a moment, during which he experienced something like remorse for what he had plotted against her.

Her ladyship became, by degrees, more communicative. She asked D'Artagnan whether his heart was occupied by any love?

"Alas!" said he, assuming the most sentimental manner that he was able, "how can you be so cruel as to ask me such a question—me, who, ever since I first saw you, have only breathed and lived by you and for you!"

The lady smiled most strangely.

"And so you love me?" said she.

"Need I tell you so now, and have you never perceived it?"

"Yes, I have; but, you know, the prouder hearts are, the more difficult they are to win."

"Ah, no difficulties can ever daunt me," replied D'Artagnan; "my only fear is of impossibilities."

"Nothing is impossible," said the lady, "to one who truly loves."

"Nothing, madame?"

"Nothing," replied she.

"I faith," thought D'Artagnan, "her tune is changed. Will the capricious creature chance to fall in love with me? and will she be disposed to give me another sapphire, equal to that she gave me for De Wardes?"

"Come," resumed her ladyship, "let me hear what you would do to prove the love that you profess?"

"Everything that you can ask. Command; and I am ready to obey."

"Everything?"

"Yes, everything!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, who knew beforehand that he did not risk much by such an engagement.

" Well, then, let us talk about it," said she, drawing her chair nearer D'Artagnan.

" I am all attention, madame," said the latter.

The lady paused for a moment, thoughtful and undecided; then, appearing to form a resolution, she said:

" I have an enemy."

" You, madame!" cried D'Artagnan, feigning surprise. " My God! good and beautiful as you are, is it possible?"

" A mortal enemy!"

" Indeed?"

" An enemy who has so cruelly insulted me that there is war to the knife between us. Can I reckon upon you as an ally?"

D'Artagnan instantly perceived what the vindictive creature was aiming at.

" You can, madame," said he, emphatically. " My arm and my life belong to you, as well as my love."

" Well, then," said her ladyship, " since you are as generous as you are enamored——" She hesitated.

" Well?" demanded D'Artagnan.

" Well," returned her ladyship, after a moment's silence, " cease, from this day, to speak of impossibilities."

" Do not overwhelm me with my happiness!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, throwing himself on his knees, and covering with kisses the hands which she abandoned to him.

" Yes!" thought the lady, " avenge me on that wretch, De Wardes, and I shall easily get rid of you afterward —double fool! animated sword-blade!"

" Yes!" thought D'Artagnan also on his side, " tell me that you love me, after having so audaciously deceived me, and then, dangerous and hypocritical woman! I will

laugh at you, with him whom you wish to punish by my hand."

Raising his head, D'Artagnan said, "I am waiting."

"You understand me, then, dear Monsieur D'Artagnan?" said her ladyship.

"I can read your every look."

"Then you will, for me, employ that arm which has already gained such great renown?"

"Yes, instantly."

"And how," said her ladyship, "shall I ever repay a service so important?"

"Your love is the only recompense I desire—the only one that would be worthy either of you or me," replied D'Artagnan; and he drew her gently toward him. She made but little resistance.

"Interested creature!" said she, smiling.

"Ah!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, carried away an instant by the passion which this woman had the power of exciting in his heart—"ah! your love appears to me improbable, and, fearful of seeing it vanish like a dream, I am impatient to receive from your own lips the assurance of its reality."

"Do you already merit such an avowal?"

"I am at your command," replied D'Artagnan.

"Are you quite determined?" said she, with a lingering doubt.

"Name the wretch who has drawn tears from your beautiful eyes?"

"And who has told you that I have wept?" exclaimed she.

"I imagined so."

"Women of my character never weep," replied her ladyship.

"So much the better. But tell me his name?"

"Remember that his name is my secret."

"Yet I must know it."

"Yes, you must. See what confidence I place in you."

"You overpower me with joy! What is his name?"

"You know him."

"Indeed!"

"Yes."

"It is not one of my friends?" said he, feigning hesitation, as an evidence of his ignorance.

"And if it was one of your friends—would you hesitate?" said her ladyship, while a threatening flash glittered in her eyes.

"Not if it was my own brother!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, as if carried away by enthusiasm.

Our Gascon advanced without danger, for he knew where he was going.

"I love your devotedness," said the lady.

"Alas! do you love only that in me?" said D'Artagnan.

"I love you also—you," replied she, taking his hand.

And this pressure made D'Artagnan tremble as though the fever which her ladyship was enduring had also infected him.

"You love me—you?" exclaimed he. "Oh! if that should come to pass, such bliss would deprive me of reason!"

He took her in his arms. She made no attempt to escape from his kisses, but she did not return them. Her lips were cold. It seemed to D'Artagnan that he was embracing a statue.

D'Artagnan was, in fact, intoxicated with joy; and in his temporary delirium, he almost believed in the tenderness of her ladyship, and in the crime of De Wardes. If the latter had been at that moment near him he would have slain him.

The lady seized the opportunity.

"He is called," she uttered in her turn.

"De Wardes—I know it!" interrupted D'Artagnan.

"And how do you know it?" asked she, seizing his two hands and looking into his eyes, as if striving to read his very soul.

D'Artagnan felt that he had allowed himself to be hurried into a false step.

"Tell me, tell me, then!" she exclaimed, "how do you know it?"

"How do I know it?" replied D'Artagnan.

"Yes!"

"I know it, because yesterday, in a drawing-room where I was, De Wardes displayed a ring, which he said you gave him."

"The wretch!" exclaimed her ladyship.

It will easily be understood that this epithet resounded in the very depths of D'Artagnan's heart.

"Well?" continued she.

"Well, I will avenge you on this—wretch!" said D'Artagnan, giving himself the airs of Don Japhet of Armenia.

"Thanks, my brave friend!" exclaimed the lady.
"And when shall I be avenged?"

"To-morrow—immediately—whenever you command!"

Her ladyship was about to exclaim—"immediately!" but she reflected that such precipitation would be but little complimentary to D'Artagnan. She had, moreover, a thousand precautions to recommend and a thousand counsels to impress on her defender, that he should avoid all explanations with the count in the presence of witnesses.

"To-morrow," resumed D'Artagnan, "you shall be revenged, or I shall be no more."

"No," said she, "revenge me, and you will not die. He is a coward."

"Toward women, perhaps; but with men—I know something of him myself."

"Why, it seems to me that in your former contest with him, you had no reason to complain of fortune."

"Fortune is a fickle jade : to-day, favorable : she may betray me to-morrow."

"Does this mean that you hesitate now ?"

"No, I do not hesitate ; God forbid ! But would it be just to permit me to go to possible death without giving me a little something more than hope ?"

Her ladyship replied by a look which said, "Is that all ? Speak " Then she said tenderly, "That is but too just."

"You are an angel," cried the young man.

"Then all is arranged ?" said she.

"Except what I ask of you, my love."

"Have I not assured you ?"

"I cannot wait !"

"Silence ! I hear my brother ; it is unnecessary that he should find you here."

She rang the bell and Kitty entered.

"Go through this door," said she to D'Artagnan, as she opened a small secret door, "and return at eleven o'clock, when we can end this conversation. Kitty will conduct you to me."

As the poor girl heard these few words, she felt as if she would sink into the earth.

"Well ! what are you about, mademoiselle, that you stand there as motionless as a statue ? Come, show this gentleman out ! Remember, at eleven to-night."

"It appears that all your appointments are for eleven o'clock," thought D'Artagnan ; "it is an established habit."

The lady gave him her hand, which he kissed with effusion.

"Well," thought he, as he went away, scarcely replying to the reproaches of Kitty, "well, I must not make a fool of myself ; unquestionably this woman is an abominable wretch : I must be on my guard !"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE LADY'S SECRET.

D'ARTAGNAN had gone out of the mansion, instead of at once ascending to Kitty's room, there to wait for the hour of his appointment with her ladyship. He had two reasons for adopting this course: the first was, that by this means he avoided the recriminations and entreaties of the girl; and the second was, that he wished coldly to reflect on, and, if possible, to penetrate, the secret thoughts of the lady.

What seemed to him most certain was, that he was exposing himself to love her ladyship like a madman; whilst she, on the other hand, did not love him the least in the world, and never would. At one time he considered that the best thing to do would be to return home, and write a long letter to her ladyship, in which he would confess, that, as far as he was concerned, he and De Wardes were the same individual, and, consequently, that it was only by suicide he could kill De Wardes. But he also had a fierce desire for vengeance. He wished to conquer this woman in his own name. And, as this vengeance was sweet to him, he could not bear to relinquish the idea of it.

He strode five or six times round the Place Royale, agitated by all these conflicting emotions, returning at every circuit to regard the light which was still visible through the blinds of her ladyship's apartment. It was manifest that she was not, on this occasion, in such eager haste to return to her chamber.

At length the light disappeared; with it was extinguished all the irresolution in D'Artagnan's heart. He recalled each detail of the interview which he had with her ladyship; and, by one of those revulsions so common in similar cases, he entered the house with his heart beating, and his head on fire, and rushed into Kitty's room.

The poor girl, pale as death, and trembling in every limb, would have kept D'Artagnan back; but her mistress, with her ear on the watch, had heard the noise he had made in entering, and opened the door.

"Come," said she.

D'Artagnan was no longer sane. He felt himself entangled in one of those fantastic intrigues which visit us in dreams. He advanced toward her ladyship, attracted by the magnetic power which the loadstone exercises over steel.

The door was closed behind them.

Kitty, in her turn, rushed forward to the door.

Jealousy, and fury, and offended pride—all the passions, in a word, which rule the heart of an enamored woman—impelled her to a confession. But she would be herself ruined, if she admitted her participation in such a trickery; and above all, D'Artagnan would be forever lost to her. This last thought of love still urged her to the crowning sacrifice.

D'Artagnan, upon his side, had reached the heights of his desire. It was not now a rival who was loved in his person; it was himself to whom the semblance of love was given. A secret voice, from the depths of his own heart, truly told him that he was only a weapon, which was caressed until it had inflicted death: but pride, and self-love, and folly silenced this voice, and stifled this murmur; and besides, our Gascon, with the degree of confidence which we know him to possess, compared himself with De Wardes, and inquired why, all things being considered, he should not be loved for himself alone.

He abandoned himself entirely to the sensations of the moment. Her ladyship was, for the time being, a living, passionate woman, abandoning herself to love, which she herself seemed to feel. Two hours thus passed. After the transports of the two lovers became calmer, the lady, who had not the same motives for forgetfulness as D'Artagnan, inquired whether the measures which were to bring about a meeting with De Wardes, on the next day, were all definitely determined on, beforehand, in his mind.

But D'Artagnan, whose ideas had taken quite another course, forgot himself, like a fool, and gallantly answered, that it was not in her presence, when he was occupied with nothing but the happiness of seeing and of hearing her, that he could think of duels with the sword.

This coldness, on the only subject which interested her, frightened her ladyship, and her questions became more pressing.

When D'Artagnan, who had never seriously thought of this impossible duel, endeavored to turn the conversation, he found himself unable.

Her ladyship kept the conference within the limits she had herself traced beforehand, with her irresistible spirit, and her iron will.

D'Artagnan then thought himself very clever in endeavoring to persuade her to renounce, by forgiving De Wardes, the furious projects she had formed.

But at the first words that he uttered, she started away from him.

"Are you afraid, dear M. d'Artagnan?" cried she, in a high and mocking tone, that sounded strangely in the darkness.

"You cannot think so, my adored," replied D'Artagnan: "but what if this poor Count de Wardes was less culpable than you imagine?"

"In any case," said her ladyship, seriously, "he has deceived me, and, from that moment, has deserved death."

"Then he shall die, since you condemn him," said D'Artagnan, in a tone so firm that it appeared to her ladyship the expression of an unconquerable devotedness.

She drew near to him once more.

We do not know how long the night seemed to her ladyship, but it only seemed two hours to D'Artagnan before morning. Seeing that he was about to arise, her ladyship reminded him of his promise to avenge her on Count de Wardes.

"Yes, I am prepared," continued D'Artagnan, with an involuntary excitement; "but, first, there is one thing that I would fain be sure of."

"What?" inquired the lady.

"That you love me."

"I have given you proof of it, I think," replied she.

"Yes! And I am yours body and soul."

"Thanks, my brave defender; and even as I prove my love by admitting you here, you will, in your turn, prove yours—will you not?"

"Certainly. But if you love me, as you say," resumed D'Artagnan, "have you no fear on my account?"

"What need I fear?"

"I might be wounded dangerously—even killed."

"Impossible," said the lady: "you are so valiant a man, and so skillful a swordsman."

"Then you would not prefer," resumed D'Artagnan, "a method which would equally well revenge you, yet, render the combat unnecessary?"

The lady looked at the young man in silence, her clear eyes had an expression singularly malevolent.

"Really," said she, "I verily believe that you are hesitating again."

“No, I have no hesitation ; but this poor De Wardes awakens my compassion, now that you no longer love him ; and it appears to me that a man must be sufficiently punished by the loss of your love without the need of further chastisement.”

“And who has told you that I ever loved him ?” asked her ladyship.

“At least, I may believe, without any great folly, that you have loved another,” replied the young man, gallantly, “and I repeat, that I am interested in the count.”

“You ?” demanded the lady. “And why ?”

“Because I alone know——”

“What ?”

“That he has been far less culpable toward you than he might appear.”

“Really !” said the lady, with an uneasy look. “Explain yourself ; for, upon my word, I cannot understand what you mean.”

And she looked at D’Artagnan, who held her in his embrace, with eyes which were gradually lighted up by a more baleful flame.

“Yes, I am a man of honor,” said D’Artagnan, determined now to finish what he had begun ; “and, since you have confessed your love for me, since I am quite sure of possessing it—for I possess it, do I not ?”

“Entirely ! But go on”

“Well, then, I find myself quite transformed, and a confession forces itself upon me.”

“A confession ?”

“If I doubted your love I would not venture on it ; but you do love me—do you not ?”

“Of course.”

“Then, if through excess of love for you I had committed a fault, you would forgive me ?”

"Perhaps so. But this confession," said she, becoming pale—"what is this confession?"

"You had an interview with De Wardes last Thursday in this very chamber, had you not?"

"I? No! it is not true," said the lady, in a tone so firm, and with a countenance so passionless, that had D'Artagnan not possessed such perfect certainty, he must have doubted.

"Do not lie, my beautiful angel," said D'Artagnan, endeavoring to smile: "it is useless."

"What do you mean? Speak, then, for you kill me."

"Oh! be at ease, you are not culpable toward me, and I have already forgiven you."

"What next—what next?"

"De Wardes has nothing to boast of."

"How? You told me yourself that this ring——"

"That ring, I myself have! The De Wardes of Thursday, and the D'Artagnan of to-day, are one and the same person."

The imprudent young man expected a surprise, mixed with bashfulness—a little storm, which would dissolve in tears, but he strangely deceived himself, and his error was quickly apparent.

Pale and terrible, her ladyship raised herself up, and repelling D'Artagnan by a violent blow on the breast, she leaped out of bed.

D'Artagnan restrained her by her robe, in order to implore her pardon. But, by a powerful and resolute effort, she endeavored to escape. In this effort, her robe gave way; and then, one of her beautiful shoulders being uncovered, D'Artagnan, with inexpressible horror, perceived upon it the *fleur-de-lis*—that indelible mark impressed by the degrading hand of the executioner.

"Great God!" exclaimed he, letting fall the robe;

and he remained mute, motionless, and horror-stricken on the bed.

But the lady felt herself denounced, even by D'Artagnan's horror. Doubtless he had seen everything. The young man now knew her secret—that terrible secret of which the whole world was ignorant, except himself.

She turned, no longer like a furious woman, but like a wounded panther.

"Ah, wretch!" said she, "you have betrayed me like a coward; and, moreover, you have learned my secret! You must die!"

And she ran to an inlaid cabinet on her toilet table, opened it with a feverish, trembling hand, drew from it a small dagger, with a golden hilt and a sharp and slender blade, and returned with one bound to D'Artagnan, who remained half naked on the bed.

Although the young man was, as we know, brave, he was frightened at that convulsed countenance, at those horribly dilated pupils, at those pale cheeks and bleeding lips; he arose, and recoiled, as at the hissing of a serpent that had coiled about his path; and, instinctively putting his damp hand to his sword, he drew it from the sheath.

But, without being at all dismayed at the sight of the sword, her ladyship still advanced towards him to strike him, and only stopped when she felt the sharp point at her bosom.

Then she attempted to seize the sword in her hands; but D'Artagnan always withheld it from her grasp, by pointing it, without touching her, sometimes at her eyes, and sometimes at her breast; whilst he still retreated and endeavored to find the door which opened into Kitty's room.

During all this time her ladyship was rushing at him



"ENDING IN A STRONG RESEMBLANCE TO A DUEL."

in horrible transports of rage, and screaming in a frantic manner.

Nevertheless, as this was ending in a strong resemblance to a duel, D'Artagnan gradually recovered his coolness.

"Well done! beautiful lady, well done!" said he; "but, for God's sake, be calm, or I will draw a second fleur-de-lis on your other shoulder."

"Wretch! wretch!" vociferated her ladyship.

But D'Artagnan, still seeking the door, merely maintained himself on the defensive.

At the noise that they made by overturning the furniture—she to get at him, and he to get behind the furniture—out of the way—Kitty opened the door. D'Artagnan, who had never ceased manoeuvring to get near this door, was only three paces from it. With one bound, therefore, he sprang out of the lady's chamber into that of her maid, and as quick as lightning, closed the door again, and leaned against it with his weight whilst Kitty secured the bolts.

Her ladyship then endeavored with a force far beyond the strength of an ordinary woman, to break down the barriers that confined her to her own room; but, finding this impossible, she stabbed the door with her dagger, sometimes penetrating the entire thickness of the wood. Each blow was accompanied by some horrid imprecation.

"Quick, quick! Kitty," said D'Artagnan in a whisper, when the bolts were locked. "Make haste and let me out of the hotel, or she will have me killed by the lackeys. Let us be quick, do you hear? for it is a matter of life and death."

"But you can't go out naked," said Kitty.

"True," said D'Artagnan, thinking for the first time of his plight. "Dress me as best you can, dear; but be quick, for it's life or death, you know."

Kitty knew only too well, and in a moment wrapped him in a flowered mantle, a hood, and a cloak. She also put slippers on his naked feet, and drew him down the stairs in the darkness. And it was time. Her ladyship had already rung, and aroused the whole of her establishment. The porter drew the cord at Kitty's voice, at the very instant that his mistress screamed from the window, "Do not let him go!"

The young man fled, whilst she still menaced him with impotent gestures. At the same moment he was lost to sight, she fell senseless in her chamber.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

HOW, WITHOUT DISTURBING HIMSELF, ATHOS OBTAINED HIS EQUIPMENT.

D'ARTAGNAN was so completely confounded, that without considering what would become of Kitty, he ran through half of Paris, and did not stop till he found himself at Athos's door. The confusion of his mind, the terror which spurred him on, the cries of some of the patrol, who had pursued him, only made him the more expeditious in his progress. He traversed the court, mounted the two flights of stairs, and knocked as if he would break down the door.

Grimaud opened it, with his eyes swollen by sleep: and D'Artagnan rushed into the ante-chamber with such violence as almost to overthrow him as he passed.

This time, at any rate, in spite of his habitual taciturnity, Grimaud found his tongue. At the sight of D'Artagnan's naked sword, the poor fellow fancied that he had to deal with some assassin.

"Help, help! murder!" exclaimed he.

"Be silent, unlucky dog!" said the young man: "I am D'Artagnan. Do you not know me? Where is your master?"

"You, M. d'Artagnan!" exclaimed the panic-stricken Grimaud. "Impossible!"

"Grimaud!" said Athos, as he quietly emerged from his chamber in his dressing-gown; "Grimaud, I believe you are permitting yourself to speak!"

"Ah! sir, it is because——"

"Silence!"

Grimaud then contented himself with pointing to D'Artagnan with his finger.

Athos, phlegmatic as he was, burst out into a fit of laughter, which was occasioned by D'Artagnan's wild appearance and strange dress.

"Do not laugh, my friend," exclaimed D'Artagnan; "in the name of heaven, do not laugh! for upon my soul, I assure you that there is nothing to laugh at."

He uttered these words with so much solemnity, and with such undissembled horror, that Athos immediately seized his hands, saying :

"Are you wounded, my friend? You are very pale."

"No; but something very terrible has just happened to me. Are you alone, Athos?"

"Zounds! who do you imagine would be with me at this time of night?"

"Good! good!"

And D'Artagnan hurried into Athos's chamber.

"Well, speak now," said the latter, bolting the door: "Is the king dead? Have you killed the cardinal? You are altogether unnerved. Come, speak, for I am dying with anxiety."

"Athos," replied D'Artagnan, "prepare to hear something perfectly incredible—terrible."

"Speak, then, speak," said Athos.

"Well, then," continued D'Artagnan, bending toward Athos's ear, and whispering, "her ladyship is branded with a fleur-de-lis upon her shoulder!"

"Ah!" exclaimed the musketeer, as if he had received a bullet in his heart.

"But are you quite sure," continued D'Artagnan, "that *the other* is really dead?"

"*The other!*" murmured Athos, in a voice so faint that D'Artagnan could scarcely hear it.

"Yes; she of whom you told me, one day, at Amiens?"
Athos groaned, and his head fell upon his hands.

"This one," said D'Artagnan, "is a woman of from twenty-six to twenty-eight years of age."

"Fair?" said Athos.

"Yes."

"With clear blue eyes, of an uncommon brightness, and with black eyelashes and eyebrows?"

"Yes."

"Tall and well formed? Has she also lost a tooth, near the eyetooth, on the left side?"

"Yes."

"The fleur-de-lis is small, of a pink color, as if somewhat effaced by the layers of paste which are applied to it?"

"Yes."

"And yet you say that this woman is English?"

"She is called 'My Lady,' but she may nevertheless be a Frenchwoman: Lord de Winter is only her brother-in-law."

"I must see her, D'Artagnan!"

"Take care, Athos, take care. You wished to kill her; she is a woman who would willingly pay you back, and is not likely to fail."

"She dare not say anything—it would be denouncing herself."

"She is equal to anything! Did you ever see her furious?"

"No," said Athos.

"A tigress! a panther! Ah, my dear Athos, I fear I have drawn down upon us both a terrible vengeance."

D'Artagnan then recounted everything—the lady's mad rage and her menace of death.

"You are quite right; and, upon my soul, I would sell my life for a hair," said Athos. "Happily, however, we

leave Paris the day after to-morrow, and probably, shall go to La Rochelle. Once off——”

“ She will pursue you to the end of the world, Athos, should she recognize you. Let her, then, vent her hatred on me alone.”

“ Ah, my friend, what does it signify if she should kill me ? ” said Athos. “ Do you for an instant suppose that I am at all anxious to live ? ”

“ There is some horrible mystery under all this, Athos. I am certain that this woman is one of the cardinal’s spies.”

“ In that case, take care of yourself. If the cardinal does not greatly admire you for that London affair, he hates you thoroughly ; but as he has, in fact, nothing to bring forward openly against you, and yet must gratify his revenge, take care of yourself. If you go out, do not go alone ; if you eat, use every precaution ; distrust everything, even your own shadow.”

“ Happily,” said D’Artagnan, “ we only need to manage till to-morrow evening without accident, for, when once with the army, I hope that we shall only have men to fear.”

“ In the meantime,” said Athos, “ I renounce my plan of seclusion, and I will go everywhere with you. You must return to the Rue des Fossoyeurs, and I will accompany you.”

“ Be it so, my dear Athos ; but first, let me return to you this ring, which I received from that woman. This sapphire is yours. Did you not tell me that it was a family jewel ? ”

“ Yes ; my father gave two thousand crowns for it, as he formerly told me ; it was amongst the marriage presents that he made my mother. It is magnificent. My mother gave it to me ; and instead of guarding it as a sacred relic, madman that I was ! I gave it to that wicked woman.”

"Well, take back your ring: for I understand how much you prize it."

"I take it, after it has passed through that wretch's hands? Never! the ring is polluted, D'Artagnan."

"Then sell it, or pledge it: you can borrow a thousand crowns on it. With that sum you will be well off; and then, with the first money you obtain, you can redeem it, cleansed of its ancient stains, since it will have passed through the hands of usurers."

Athos smiled.

"You are a charming companion, my dear D'Artagnan," said he; "your eternal gayety revives the souls of the afflicted. Well, then, let us pledge this ring of mine on one condition."

"And what is that?"

"That you shall take five hundred crowns, and I will have five hundred."

"But think a moment, Athos. I shall not want a quarter of that sum—who am only in the guards; and, by selling my saddle, I can easily procure it. What do I really want? A horse for Planchet—nothing more. Besides, you forget that I have a ring also."

"Which you value even more than I do mine: at least I think I have so observed."

"Yes; for, in extremities it might relieve us not only from great embarrassment, but even from great danger. It is not a simple diamond—it is also an enchanted talisman."

"I do not understand you, yet I believe what you say. But, to return to my ring, or rather ours: you shall take half the sum it may produce, or I will throw it into the Seine; and I much doubt whether, as in the case of Polycrates, a fish would be so obliging as to bring it back to us."

"Well, then, I agree," said D'Artagnan.

At this moment, Grimaud came in, accompanied by Planchet, who was uneasy about his master, and anxious to know what had happened to him.

Athos dressed himself; and, when he was ready to go out, made the sign of a man taking aim to Grimaud. The latter immediately took down his carbine, and prepared to follow his master.

D'Artagnan and Athos, attended by their servants, reached the Rue des Fossoyeurs in safety. M. Bonancieux was at his door, and looked at D'Artagnan with a bantering air.

"Hallo, my dear lodger," said he, "make haste. There is a pretty young girl waiting for you; and ladies, you know, do not like to be kept waiting."

"It is Kitty!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, as he rushed towards the stairs.

In fact, on the landing-place before his apartment, crouching against his door, he found the trembling girl. As soon as she saw him, she exclaimed:

"You promised me your protection—you promised to save me from her anger: remember, it is you who have ruined me!"

"Yes, certainly," said D'Artagnan; "make yourself easy about that, Kitty. But what happened after I was gone?"

"I can scarcely tell," replied Kitty. "At the outcries that she made, the servants ran to her. She was furious with passion. Whatever can be uttered in the way of imprecation, she vomited forth against you. Then I knew she would soon remember that it was through my room that you had entered hers, and would take me for your accomplice: so I collected the little money that I had, and my most precious clothes, and ran hither for safety."

"Poor child! But what am I to do with you? I am going off the day after to-morrow."

"Anything you like, sir. Send me away from Paris—send me out of France."

"But I cannot take you with me to the Siege of La Rochelle," said D'Artagnan.

"No; but you might place me in the service of some lady of your acquaintance—in your own country, for instance."

"Ah! my child, in my own province the ladies have no waiting-maids. But wait: I know what I will do. Planchet, go to Aramis, and ask him to come here directly. We have matters of great importance to communicate."

"I understand," said Athos; "but why not Porthos? It appears to me, that his marchioness——"

"Porthos's marchioness, sooner than keep a lady's maid, would have her clothes put on by her husband's clerks," said D'Artagnan, laughing. "Besides, Kitty would rather not live in the Rue aux Ours! Is not that so, Kitty?"

"I will live where your please," said Kitty, "provided I am concealed, and that nobody knows where I am."

"But, Kitty, now that we are going to be parted, and that you are therefore no longer jealous of me——"

"Sir," interrupted Kitty, "far or near, I shall never cease to love you."

"Where the deuce does constancy build its nest?" muttered Athos.

"And I, also," said D'Artagnan—"I, also, shall always love you, you may be sure. But now, answer me. This question is one of great importance—did you never hear anything said about a young woman who was carried off one night?"

"Wait a minute. Oh! my God, sir! Do you still love ~~her~~ that woman?"

"No. It is one of my friends who loves her. Yes—it is Athos there."

"I!" exclaimed Athos, in a tone pretty much like that

of the man who sees himself about to tread upon an adder.

"Yes, to be sure, you!" said D'Artagnan, pressing Athos's hand. "You know the interest we all take in that poor little Madame Bonancieux. Besides, Kitty will not tell—will you, Kitty? You understand, my child," exclaimed D'Artagnan, "that she is the wife of that ugly ape whom you saw upon the doorstep as you came in."

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed Kitty, "you remind me how frightened I was lest he should have recognized me!"

"How *recognized!* Then you have seen this man before?"

"Yes, he came twice to my lady's."

"Exactly so. About what time?"

"About a fortnight ago."

"Just about the time."

"And yesterday evening he came again."

"Yesterday evening?"

"Yes, only a few minutes before you came yourself."

"My dear Athos, we are enveloped in a web of spies! And do you believe that he knew you again, Kitty?"

"I drew down my hood when I saw him—but perhaps it was too late."

"Go down, Athos; he suspects you less than me; and see whether he is still at the door."

Athos went down, and returned immediately.

"He is gone," said he, "and the house is shut up."

"He is gone to make his report, and to say that all the pigeons are at this moment in the dove-cote.*"

"Well, then, let us be off," said Athos, "leaving only Planchet here to bring us intelligence."

"Wait one instant! And what about Aramis, whom we have sent for?"

"True," said Athos, "let us wait for Aramis."

An instant afterward Aramis entered. They explained the affair to him, and told him how urgent it was for him to find, amongst some of his high connections, a situation for Kitty.

"And will this really be a service to you, D'Artagnan?"
"I will be grateful for it forever."

"Well, then, Madame de Bois Tracy has requested me to find a trustworthy waiting-maid for one of her friends, who lives in the country; and if you, my dear D'Artagnan, can answer for the young woman——"

"Oh! sir," exclaimed Kitty, "I shall be entirely devoted, be assured, to the lady who will give me the means of leaving Paris."

"Then," said Aramis, "nothing can be better."

He sat himself down at the table and wrote a short note, which he sealed with a ring, and gave to Kitty.

"And now, my child," said D'Artagnan, "you know that this place is no safer for us than for you. So let us separate. We shall meet again in happier days."

"And at whatever time or place we may meet again, sir," said Kitty, "you will find I love you even more than I do now."

"A gamester's vow!" said Athos, whilst D'Artagnan was gone to accompany Kitty down the stairs.

A few minutes afterward, the three friends separated, after making an appointment for four o'clock at Athos's chambers, and leaving Planchet to mind the house.

Aramis returned home, and Athos and D'Artagnan busied themselves pledging the sapphire.

As our Gascon had foreseen, they easily procured three hundred pistoles on the ring; and the Jew declared, moreover, that, if they chose to sell it, as it would make a splendid drop for ear-rings, he would give as much as five hundred pistoles for it.

Athos and D'Artagnan, with the activity of soldiers,

and the science of connoisseurs, scarcely spent three hours in purchasing the equipment of a musketeer. Besides, Athos had the character and manners of a nobleman, even to his fingers' ends. Directly anything suited him, he paid for it at once, without haggling to reduce the price. D'Artagnan wished to make some observations ; but Athos laid his hand on his shoulder, smiling ; and D'Artagnan understood that it was very well for a little Gascon gentleman like him to bargain, but not for a man who had the deportment of a prince.

The musketeer saw a superb Andalusian horse, as black as jet, with fiery nostrils, and fine and elegant legs, rising six years. He examined it, and found it faultless. He got it for a thousand francs. Perhaps he might have obtained it for less ; but whilst D'Artagnan was discussing the price with the dealer, Athos counted down the hundred pistoles on the table.

Grimaud had a strong and short-limbed horse, from Picardy, which cost three hundred francs.

But when the saddle of this latter horse, and Grimaud's arms, were bought, Athos had not one sou remaining of the hundred and fifty pistoles. D'Artagnan therefore begged his friend to bite a mouthful out of his share, which he could restore to him afterward, if he chose. But Athos only answered by shrugging his shoulders.

"How much did the Jew say he would give for the sapphire, to buy it out and out ?" asked he, at last.

"Five hundred pistoles."

"That is two hundred pistoles more—a hundred for each of us. Why, that is quite a fortune ! Let us go to the Jew again, my friend."

"But would you really sell it ?"

"Yes ; this ring would unquestionably recall melancholy memories. Besides, we shall never have three hundred pistoles to return to him ; therefore, we should

actually lose two hundred by the bargain. Go and tell him that the ring is his, D'Artagnan, and come back with the two hundred pistoles."

" Reflect, Athos."

" Ready money is scarce in these times, and we should learn to make sacrifices. Go, D'Artagnan, go. Grimaud shall bear you company with his carbine."

Half an hour afterward, D'Artagnan returned with the two thousand livres; no accident having befallen him.

It was thus that Athos found, without giving himself any trouble, resources which he did not expect.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A CHARMING VISION.

At the appointed hour the four friends were once more gathered at the house of Athos. All anxiety about equipments had disappeared, and their faces no longer bore the marks of any but their own secret care—for, behind all present happiness, there lurks some fear about the future.

Suddenly Planchet entered, bearing two letters addressed to D'Artagnan. One was a little note, delicately folded lengthways, with a pretty seal of green wax, on which was depicted a dove bearing a green bough. The other was a large square epistle, glittering with the terrible arms of his eminence, the cardinal-duke.

At sight of the little letter, D'Artagnan's heart bounded, for he believed he recognized the writing; and though he had only seen the hand once, the memory of it was engraved in his heart's core. So he took the note and unsealed it hastily.

"Walk out," it said, "about six or seven o'clock on Wednesday evening next, on the Chaillot road, and look carefully into the carriages as they pass. But if you value your own life, or that of some one who loves you, do not speak, do not make one motion which may show that you have recognized her who exposes herself to every ill, only to see you for an instant."

There was no signature.

"It is a trap," said Athos: "do not go, D'Artagnan."

"And yet," said D'Artagnan, "I think that I know the writing well."

"But it may be feigned," said Athos. "At six or seven o'clock at this season, the Chaillot road is completely deserted, as much so as if you went to walk in the Forest of Bondy."

"But suppose we all go?" said D'Artagnan. "Surely they could not eat us all four, besides the four servants, the horses, and our arms: the act would certainly bring on a fit of indigestion."

"Besides, it will be a fine opportunity to display our equipments," said Porthos.

"But, if it is a woman who writes," said Aramis, "and this woman does not wish to be seen, consider that you compromise her, D'Artagnan, which is not right in a gentleman."

"We will remain behind," said Porthos, "and he can advance alone."

"Yes, but a pistol-shot is easily fired from a carriage going at full speed."

"Bah!" said D'Artagnan, "it will miss me. And we would then overtake the carriage, and exterminate whoever might be in it. It would be just so many enemies the fewer."

"He is right," said Porthos: "let us give battle. Besides, we must needs try our arms."

"Faith! let us treat ourselves to this pleasure," said Aramis, in his soft and careless way.

"Just as you please," said Athos.

"Gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, "it is now half-past four, and we have just time enough to get to the Chaillot road by six."

"Besides, if we go too late, no one will see us," said

Porthos ; "and that would be a sad pity. Let us get ready, gentlemen."

"But this second letter," said Athos, "you forget that. And yet, I fancy, the seal indicates that it is worth opening. As for me, I confess, my dear D'Artagnan, that I think much more of it than of that little rose-leaf which you so gently deposited, just now, over your heart."

D'Artagnan blushed.

"Well," said the young man, "let us now see what his eminence wants with me."

D'Artagnan opened the letter, and read :

"M. d'Artagnan, of the king's guards, of M. des Essarts' company, is expected at the cardinal's palace at eight o'clock this evening.

LAHOUDINIERE,

"Captain of the Guards."

"The devil!" said Athos, "here is an appointment not a whit less disquieting, in other respects, than the first."

"I will go to the second, on returning from the first," said D'Artagnan. "One is at seven, the other at eight. There will be time enough for both."

"Hum! I would not go," said Aramis. "A gallant gentleman cannot decline an appointment made by a lady; but a prudent gentleman may excuse himself from waiting on his eminence, particularly when he has some reason to believe that he is not sent for to listen to compliments."

"I am of Aramis's opinion," said Porthos.

"Gentlemen," replied D'Artagnan, "I have formerly received a similar invitation from his eminence, through M. de Cavois. I neglected it, and the next day a great misfortune happened to me: Constance disappeared. Whatever may be the result, I will go."

"If you are determined," said Athos, "go."

"But the Bastile," said Aramis.

"Bah! you will get me out again," rejoined D'Artagnan.

"Certainly," replied Aramis and Porthos, with the greatest coolness, and as if it had been the simplest thing in the world: "Certainly, we will pull you out again. But, as we must be off to the wars the day after to-morrow, you would do better not to run the risk of getting in."

"Let us do better," said Athos; "let us not leave him throughout the evening. Let each of us, with three musketeers in company, wait at a gate of the palace. If we see any closed carriage, that looks suspicious, coming out, we will fall upon it. It is a long time since we have had a crow to pluck with the cardinal's guards; and M. de Treville must think us dead."

"Decidedly, Athos," said Aramis; "you were cut out for the general of an army. What do you say to the plan, gentlemen?"

"Admirable!" cried the young men, in chorus.

"I have got no horse," said D'Artagnan, "but I can go and take one of M. de Treville's."

"That is unnecessary," remarked Aramis; "you can have one of mine."

"How many have you, then?" inquired D'Artagnan.

"Three," replied Aramis, smiling.

"My dear fellow," said Athos, "you are certainly the best paid poet in France."

"Or in Navarre," added D'Artagnan.

"But listen, my dear Aramis," said Athos; "you will not know what to do with three horses, will you? I do not understand, indeed, why you bought three."

"Nor did I, in fact, buy more than two," replied Aramis.

"Did the third come from the clouds, then?"

"No; the third was brought to me this morning, by a servant without livery, who would not tell me from whom he came; and who merely said that he had been ordered by his master——"

"Or his mistress," interrupted D'Artagnan.

"That makes no difference," said Aramis, coloring; "and who merely said that he had been ordered by his mistress, to put this horse in my stable, without leaving word from whom it came."

"It is only to poets such things ever happen," gravely remarked Athos.

"Well, then, in that case we can do better," said D'Artagnan. "Which of the two horses shall you ride, Aramis? that which you bought, or that which was given you?"

"That which was given to me, without doubt. You understand, D'Artagnan, that I could not so affront——"

"The unknown donor," added D'Artagnan.

"Or the unknown donatrix," said Athos.

"Then the horse you bought becomes of no further use to you?"

"Not much."

"You chose it yourself?"

"And with the greatest care. The safety of the horseman, you know, depends almost always on his horse."

"Well, then, let me have him at the price you gave."

"I was going to offer you this trifle, my dear D'Artagnan, giving you your own time to repay me."

"And how much did he cost you?"

"Eight hundred francs."

"Here are forty double pistoles, my dear friend," said D'Artagnan, taking that sum from his pocket. "I know that it is the same coin in which you are paid for poems."

"You are in funds, then?"

"Rich—rolling in wealth!" said D'Artagnan, rattling the rest of his pistoles in his pocket.

"Send your saddle, then, to the quarters of the musketeers, and your horse shall be brought here with ours."

"Very well. But it is almost five o'clock. Let us make haste."

In about a quarter of an hour afterward, Porthos appeared at the end of the Rue Ferou, on a magnificent Spanish horse. Musqueton was following him, on a small but strong horse from Auvergne. Porthos was glittering with joy and pride.

At the same time Aramis was seen, at the other end of the street, mounted on a superb English steed. Bazin followed, on a roan horse, leading a vigorous Mecklenburgian horse, which now belonged to D'Artagnan.

The two musketeers met at the door, Athos and D'Artagnan were looking down at them from the window.

"By my faith!" said Aramis, "you have a superb horse there, my friend."

"Yes," replied Porthos, "it is the one that was to have been sent at first. A foolish joke of a certain husband substituted the other; but the gentleman has been well punished since, and I have obtained satisfaction."

Grimaud appeared in his turn, leading his master's horse. D'Artagnan and Athos came down, got into their saddles by the side of their companions, and all four proceeded toward the quay—Athos on the horse for which he was indebted to his wife; Aramis on the horse for which he was indebted to his mistress; Porthos on the horse for which he was indebted to the attorney's wife; and D'Artagnan on the horse for which he was indebted only to his own good fortune, which is the best of all mistresses.

The valets followed them.

As Porthos anticipated, the cavalcade produced a fine effect; and, if Madame Coquenard had been in Porthos's path, and could have seen how well he looked upon his fine Spanish steed, she would hardly have regretted the bleeding that she had performed upon her husband's strong-box.

Near the Louvre, the four friends met M. de Treville returning from St. Germain. He stopped them, to compliment them on their equipment; which drew around them, in an instant, a hundred loungers.

D'Artagnan took advantage of this circumstance to tell M. de Treville about the letter, with the great red seal and ducal arms. It will be imagined that, about the other letter, he did not breathe a syllable.

M. de Treville approved of the resolution they had formed, and assured him that if he should not be seen again on the next day, he would manage to find him out, wherever he might be.

At that moment the clock of the Samaritan struck six. The four friends excused themselves, on account of an engagement, and set off.

A short gallop took them to the Chaillot road. The day was beginning to decline. Carriages were passing backward and forward. D'Artagnan, guarded by his friends at a little distance, looked eagerly into every carriage, but saw no face he knew.

At length, after about a quarter of an hour's expectation, and as the twilight thickened around, a carriage advancing at the utmost speed of the horses, was seen upon the Sèvres road. A presentiment announced to D'Artagnan that this carriage contained the individual who had made the appointment with him. The young man was himself astonished at the violent beating of his heart. Almost at the same instant, a woman's head was visible at the window, with two fingers on the lips,

as if to enjoin silence, or to send a kiss. D'Artagnan uttered a faint cry of joy. This woman, or rather this apparition, for the carriage passed with the rapidity of a vision, was Madame Bonancieux.

By an involuntary movement, and in spite of ^{the} caution he had received, D'Artagnan pushed his horse into a gallop ; and in a few bounds he was beside the carriage; but the window was hermetically closed—the vision was no longer there.

D'Artagnan then remembered the warning. “If you value your own life, and that of those who love you, remain motionless, as if you had seen nothing.”

He stopped, therefore, trembling, not for himself, but for the poor woman, who had evidently exposed herself to no trifling peril by the appointment she had made.

The carriage proceeded on its way, and, still advancing rapidly, soon entered Paris, and disappeared.

D'Artagnan had remained speechless on the same spot, knowing not what to think. If it was really Madame Bonancieux, and if she was returning to Paris, why this fugitive meeting, why this passing interchange of glances, why this kiss, committed to the winds ? If, on the other hand, it was not really she—which was in fact very possible, for the insufficiency of light made error easy—might not this be the signal of an attack commenced by the love of a woman for whom his love was known ?

The three companions gathered around him. They had all distinctly seen a woman's head at the window, but neither of them, except Athos, knew Madame Bonancieux. Athos believed that it was really that lady whom they had seen ; but, having been less engrossed than D'Artagnan by that pretty face, he thought that he had seen a second head, a man's, at the back of the carriage.

"If that is the case," said D'Artagnan "they are undoubtedly conveying her from one prison to another. But what can they want with the poor creature, and how can I ever rescue or rejoin her ?"

"My friend," said Athos, gravely, "remember that the dead are the only people we can never meet again on earth. You know something to that effect, as well as I do, do you not? Now if your mistress is not really dead, if it was actually she whom we saw just now, at one time or another you two will meet again. And perhaps," added he, in those tones of misanthropy which were habitual to him, "perhaps more quickly even than you might have wished!"

It now struck half-past seven : the carriage had been twenty minutes beyond the appointed time. His friends reminded D'Artagnan that there was another visit to pay ; which, however, it was yet possible for him to decline.

But D'Artagnan was, at the same time, both obstinate and curious. He had, in his own mind, determined to go to the cardinal's palace, and to know what his eminence had to say to him. Nothing could make him change his resolution. They reached the Rue St. Honoré, and the Place du Palais Cardinal, where they found the twelve musketeers walking about, whilst they awaited their companions. Then, first, was the business they had met for communicated to these brave allies.

D'Artagnan was well known to the honorable company of king's musketeers, amongst whom, it was also understood, that he would one day take his place ; he was therefore regarded as a comrade, by anticipation. It resulted from this, that every one willingly engaged in the affair to which they had been invited ; and they had, moreover, the probability of doing an ill turn to the cardinal or his people ; and for such expeditions these worthy gentlemen were always well prepared.

Athos divided them into three parties ; of one, he took the command himself ; the second, he gave to Aramis ; and the third, to Porthos ; and then each party placed itself in ambush, opposite an entrance to the palace.

D'Artagnan, on his part, boldly entered by the principal gate.

Although he felt himself strongly supported, the young man did not ascend the grand staircase without uneasiness. His conduct toward her ladyship bore, indeed, some slight resemblance to treachery, and he suspected that there were political relations between this woman and the cardinal. Moreover, De Wardes, whom he had handled so roughly, was a faithful follower of his eminence, and D'Artagnan well knew, that, if the cardinal was a terror to his enemies, he was also constant in his attachment to his friends.

"If De Wardes has related the details of our interview to his eminence, of which there can be no doubt, and if he has recognized me, which is probable, I may consider myself a condemned man," thought D'Artagnan, shaking his head. "But why should he have waited till to-day. It is clear enough her ladyship has made complaints against me, with all that hypocritical sorrow which renders her so interesting : and this last crime has made the vase run over. Fortunately," added he, "my good friends are below, and they will not let me be carried off without a struggle. And yet M. de Treville's company of musketeers, alone, cannot carry on a war against the cardinal, who disposes of the forces of all France, and before whom the queen has no power, and the king no will. D'Artagnan, my friend, thou art prudent, thou hast excellent qualities, but—women will destroy thee !"

He had come to this sad conclusion just as he entered the ante-chamber. He gave his letter to the officer on

duty, who showed him into the interior of the palace.

In this room there were five or six of his excellency's guards, who recognized D'Artagnan, and knowing that it was he who had wounded Jussac, looked at him with a singular smile.

This smile seemed to D'Artagnan a bad omen. But as our Gascon was not easily intimidated, or, rather, thanks to the abundant pride natural to the men of his province, did not easily betray what was passing in his mind when his emotions resembled fear—he stood boldly before the gentlemen of the guards, and waited, with a hand upon his hip in an attitude not shorn of dignity.

The officer entered, and made a sign to D'Artagnan to follow.

It seemed to the young man, that, as he left, the guards began to whisper to each other.

He went along a corridor, passed through a large saloon, entered a library, and found himself before a man, who was seated at a desk writing.

The officer beckoned him in, and retired without uttering a word.

D'Artagnan remained standing, and examined this man.

At first, D'Artagnan thought that he was in the presence of a judge, who was examining his papers; but he soon saw that the man at the desk was writing, or rather correcting, lines of an unequal length, and was scanning the words upon his fingers; he found that he was in the presence of a poet. At the expiration of a minute the poet closed his manuscript, on the back of which was written, "Mirame: a Tragedy in five acts."

He raised his head; and D'Artagnan recognized the cardinal.

CHAPTER XL.

A TERRIBLE VISION.

RICHELIEU rested his elbow on his manuscript, and his cheek on his hand, and looked at D'Artagnan for an instant. No one had an eye more profoundly penetrating than the cardinal ; and the young man felt this look running through his veins like quicksilver.

Nevertheless, he kept a good countenance, holding his hat in his hand, and waiting his eminence's pleasure, without too much pride, but at the same time without too much humility.

"Sir," said the cardinal, "are you one D'Artagnan, of Béarn ?"

"Yes, my lord."

"There are several branches of the D'Artagnans in Tarbes, and in its neighborhood : to which of them do you belong ?"

"I am the son of him who fought in the religious wars, and with the great King Henry, the father of his gracious majesty."

"Ah, yes—it is you who set out from your native place, about seven or eight months ago, to come and seek your fortune in the capital?"

"Yes, my lord."

"You came by Meung, where something happened to you—I do not exactly know what—but something?"

"My lord," said D'Artagnan, "this is what happened—"

"Unnecessary, quite unnecessary," interrupted the cardinal, with a smile which indicated that he knew the story quite as well as he who wished to tell it. "You were recommended to M. de Treville, were you not?"

"Yes, my lord, but in that unlucky affair at Meung—"

"The letter of introduction was lost," resumed his eminence. "Yes, I know that. But M. de Treville is a skillful physiognomist, who knows men at the first sight, and he has placed you in the company of his brother-in-law, M. des Essarts, leaving you to hope, that, some day or other, you will be admitted into the musketeers."

"Your lordship is perfectly correct."

"Since that time many things have happened to you: you walked behind the Chartreux, one day, when you had much better have been elsewhere; then you made a journey to the waters of the Forges, with your friends; they stopped upon the road, but you—you continued your journey. That was natural enough: you had business in England."

"My lord," said D'Artagnan, quite confounded, "I went—"

"To hunt at Windsor, or somewhere else. That is no business of anybody's. *I* know it, because it is my duty to know everything. On your return, you were received by an august person. I see with pleasure that you have kept the memorial which she gave you."

D'Artagnan put his hand on the diamond which the queen had given him, and quickly turned the stone inward: but it was too late.

"On the next day, you were waited upon by Cavois," continued the cardinal: "he came to beg you to come to the palace. But you did not return that visit; and, in that, you were wrong."

"My lord, I feared that I had incurred your eminence's displeasure."

"And why so, sir? Because you had performed the orders of your superiors, with more intelligence and courage than another could have done? Incur my displeasure, when you merited praise? It is those who do not obey that I punish; and not those who, like you, obey—too well. And to prove it, recall the date of the day on which I sent for you to come to see me, and seek in your memory what happened on that very night."

It was the evening on which Madame Bonancieux was carried off. D'Artagnan shuddered; and he remembered, that, half an hour before, the poor woman had passed before him, no doubt again borne away by the same power which directed that abduction.

"At last," continued the cardinal, "as I had heard nothing of you for some time, I wished to know what you were doing. Besides, you certainly owe me some thanks: you have yourself remarked what consideration has been always shown toward you."

D'Artagnan bowed respectfully.

"That," continued the cardinal, "proceeded not only from a sentiment of natural equity, but also from a plan that I had traced respecting you."

D'Artagnan was more and more astonished.

"It was my desire," continued the cardinal, "to explain this plan to you on the day that you received my first invitation; but you did not come. Fortunately, nothing has been lost by the delay; and to-day you shall hear it. Sit down, then, before me, M. d'Artagnan; you are gentleman enough not to be kept standing whilst you listen."

The cardinal pointed out a chair to the young man, who was so astonished at what was taking place, that he waited, before he obeyed, for a second intimation from his interlocutor.

"You are brave, M. d'Artagnan," resumed his eminence; "and you are prudent, which is even better. I love men

of head and heart. "Do not be alarmed," he added, smiling; "by men of heart, I mean courageous men. But, young as you are, and scarcely entering the world, your enemies are very powerful. If you do not take care, they will destroy you."

"Alas! my lord," replied the young man, "they will undoubtedly accomplish it very easily; for they are strong and well-supported, whilst I stand alone."

"Yes, that is true; but, alone as you are, you have already done much, and will, I doubt not, do still more. Yet you have, I believe, occasion for a guide in the adventurous career you have undertaken; since, if I am not deceived, you have come to Paris, with the ambitious intention of making a fortune."

"I am at the age of foolish hopes, my lord," said D'Artagnan.

"No hopes are foolish, except for blockheads, sir; and you are a man of ability. Come, what would you say to an ensigncy in my guards, and a company at the end of the campaign?"

"Ah, my lord!"

"You accept it—of course?"

"My lord—" replied D'Artagnan, with an embarrassed air.

"What? Do you decline it?" exclaimed the cardinal with a look of astonishment.

"I am in his majesty's guards, my lord, and I have no reason to be discontented."

"But it seems to me," said his eminence, "that my guards are also his majesty's guards; and that whoever serves in a French regiment, serves the king."

"My lord, your eminence has misunderstood my words."

"You want a pretext, do you not? I understand. Very well! A pretext, here it is—promotion, the opening

of a campaign, the opportunity which I offer you—these will be sufficient for the world; for yourself, the necessity of sure protection. For it is as well for you to be informed, M. d'Artagnan, that I have received serious complaints against you. You do not consecrate your nights and days exclusively to the service of the king."

D'Artagnan blushed.

"Moreover," added the cardinal, laying his hand on a roll of paper, "I have here a whole bundle of particulars about you. But, before reading them, I wished to talk with you. I know that you are a man of resolution; and your services, if well directed, instead of leading to disaster, might benefit you greatly. Come, reflect and determine."

"Your goodness confounds me, my lord," replied D'Artagnan: "and I discover in your eminence a greatness of soul which makes me feel by your side insignificant as an earthworm—but, in fact, since your eminence permits me to speak frankly——"

D'Artagnan stopped.

"Say on."

"Well, then, I will inform your eminence that all my friends are amongst the musketeers and the king's guards; and that all my enemies, by some inconceivable fatality, are in the service of your eminence. On this account, I should be unwelcome here, and despised there, if I accepted what you are good enough to offer."

"And can you already have the exalted idea that I do not offer you as much as you deserve, sir?" inquired the cardinal, with a scornful smile.

"My lord, your eminence is a hundred times too good to me; and, on the contrary, I do not think that I have yet done enough to be deserving of your kindness. The siege of La Rochelle is about to commence, my lord. I shall serve under your own eyes; and, if I shall have the good fortune to conduct myself in such a manner at

the siege, as to merit your approbation, it will be well! After that, I shall at least have, in the past, some action of sufficient brilliancy to justify the protection with which your eminence may condescend to honor me. Everything should be effected at an opportune time. Perhaps, hereafter, I may have the right to give myself away—at present, I should be supposed to sell myself."

"That is to say, you refuse to serve me, sir?" said the cardinal, in a tone of anger, through which, however, might be traced a sentiment of esteem. "Remain in freedom, then, and still preserve your hatreds and your sympathies."

"My lord——"

"Well, well," continued the cardinal; "I am not offended with you; but you must understand—it is quite enough to protect and recompense one's friends: one owes nothing to one's enemies. And yet I will give you one piece of advice. Take care of yourself, M. d'Artagnan: for, from the moment that I have withdrawn my hand from you, I would not give one farthing for your life."

"I will do my best, my lord," replied the Gascon, with unpresuming confidence.

"And hereafter, should any misfortune befall you, remember"—said Richelieu, significantly—"that it is I who sought you, and that I have done what I could to shield you from disaster."

"Let what may happen," said D'Artagnan, bowing, with his hand upon his breast, "I shall retain a sentiment of eternal gratitude to your eminence, for what you are doing for me at the present time."

"Well, then, M. d'Artagnan, as you say, we shall see each other again; during the campaign I shall keep my eye upon you, for I shall be there," continued the cardinal, pointing to a magnificent suit of armor which he

was to wear. "And, on our return, we will decide on some arrangement!"

"Ah, my lord!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, "spare me the weight of your displeasure; remain neuter, my lord, if you find that I behave gallantly."

"Young man," said Richelieu, "if I can again say to you what I have said to you to-day, I promise you that I *will* do so."

This last expression of Richelieu involved a terrible doubt. It alarmed D'Artagnan more than a threat would have done, for it was a warning. It implied that the cardinal was endeavoring to screen him from some impending evil. He opened his lips to answer, but, with an imperial gesture, the cardinal dismissed him.

D'Artagnan left the room, but at the door his heart almost failed him, and he was strongly tempted to return. Yet Athos's serious and severe countenance rose before his mind. If he agreed to what the cardinal proposed, Athos would no longer stretch him out his hand —Athos would disown him.

It was this fear that determined him. So powerful is the influence of a truly noble character over all that approach it.

D'Artagnan went down by the same staircase that he had ascended, and found before the door Athos and the four musketeers awaiting him, who were beginning to be anxious about him. With one word he reassured them, and Planchet ran to the other posts to announce that any further watch was unnecessary, as his master had returned, safe and sound, out of the cardinal's palace.

When they were housed at Athos's, Aramis and Porthos inquired about the object of this singular interview; but D'Artagnan merely told them that Richelieu had sent for him to offer him an ensign's commission in the guards, and that he had refused it.

"And you were right!" exclaimed Aramis and Porthos, with one voice.

Athos fell into a profound reverie, and said nothing. But when he was alone with D'Artagnan, he added :

"You have done right, although, perhaps, you have committed a mistake in doing so."

D'Artagnan sighed; for that voice responded to a secret whisper of his own soul, which announced that great misfortunes were impending.

The next day was occupied in preparations for departure.

D'Artagnan went to take leave of M. de Treville. At this time, it was still believed that the separation of the guards and musketeers would be but momentary—the king holding his parliament that very day, and proposing to set out on the next. M. de Treville therefore only asked D'Artagnan whether he wanted anything of him; but D'Artagnan replied that he had all he needed.

In the evening, all the comrades of M. de Treville's and M. des Essarts' companies, who had become attached to one another, met together. They were about to part—to meet again, when, and if, it should please God to let them. The night was, therefore, as may be supposed, a boisterous one; for, on such occasions, nothing but extreme indulgence can drive away excessive care.

The next day, at the first sound of the trumpets, the friends separated: the musketeers hastened to M. de Treville's hotel, and the guards to that of M. des Essarts. Each captain then led his company to the Louvre, where the king reviewed them.

His majesty was sad, and seemed in ill health, which detracted somewhat from his usual dignified appearance. In fact, the evening before, a fever had attacked him, even whilst he was presiding over a court of judicature,

amidst the parliament. But he was not the less determined to set out in the evening; and, in spite of all persuasions, he insisted on holding this review, hoping, by this vigorous opposition, to overpower the malady that had assailed him.

The review being ended, the guards alone began their march—the musketeers being to set out only with the king—a delay which gave Porthos an opportunity of displaying his superb equipage in the Rue aux Ours.

The attorney's wife saw him passing by, in his new uniform, and on his splendid horse. And she loved Porthos too well to let him leave her thus; so she beckoned him to dismount and enter. Porthos was magnificent: his spurs rattled, his cuirass beamed, and his sword smote clashing against his legs. The clerks had no disposition to laugh this time: the musketeer looked too much like one who would soon slit their ears.

The visitor was introduced to M. Coquenard, whose little gray eyes glistened with rage when he beheld his pretended cousin so showily adorned. Nevertheless, he had one source of inward consolation. It was everywhere reported that the campaign would be a rough one; and he gently hoped, at the bottom of his heart, that Porthos might be amongst the slain.

Porthos presented his compliments to Master Coquenard, and took his leave. The attorney wished him all sorts of prosperity. As to Madame Coquenard, she was unable to restrain her tears, but no scandalous thoughts could be suggested by her grief; she was known to be strongly attached to her relations, on whose account she had always had the bitterest contentions with her husband.

Whilst the attorney's wife was able to follow her handsome cousin with her eyes, she waved a handkerchief, and leaned herself from the window as though she

was about to tumble into the street. Porthos received all these indications of tenderness like a man accustomed to such demonstrations. But, as he turned the corner of the street, he raised his hat, and waved it in token of adieu.

Aramis, on his part, wrote a long letter. To whom? None knew. In the next room, Kitty, who was to set off that very evening for Tours, was waiting for this mysterious epistle.

Athos drank, sip by sip, the last bottle of his Spanish wine.

In the meantime, D'Artagnan was marching with his company. In passing through the Faubourg St. Antoine he turned, and looked gayly at the Bastile, which he had at least as yet escaped. As he was gazing only at the Bastile, he did not see Her Ladyship, who, mounted on a dun horse, pointed him out with her finger, to two ill-looking men, who immediately came close to the ranks to reconnoiter him. To an interrogation which they addressed to the lady by a look, she answered by a sign that he was indeed the man. Then, certain that there could be no mistake in the execution of her orders, she spurred her horse and disappeared.

The two men followed the company; and, at the end of the Faubourg St. Antoine, they mounted two horses, which a servant out of livery was holding in readiness for them.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE SIEGE OF LA ROCHELLE.

THE siege of La Rochelle was one of the greatest events of the reign of Louis XIII.

The political views of the cardinal, when he undertook the siege, were extensive. Of the important cities which had been given by Henry IV. to the Huguenots, as places of safety, La Rochelle alone remained. The cardinal wished to destroy this last bulwark of Calvinism.

La Rochelle, which had derived additional importance from the ruin of the other Calvinistic towns, was, besides, the last port that remained open to the English in the kingdom of France: and by closing it to England—our eternal enemy—the cardinal would end the work of Joan of Arc, and of the Duke of Guise.

Thus it was, that Bassompierre, who was at the same time both Protestant and Catholic—a Protestant from conviction, and a Catholic as commander of the Saint Esprit—Bassompierre, who was a German by birth, and a Frenchman at heart—Bassompierre who had a particular command at the siege of La Rochelle—said, on charging at the head of many other Protestant noblemen like himself, “You will see, gentlemen, that we shall be fools enough to take La Rochelle.”

And Bassompierre was right. The cannonades of the isle of Ré were a prelude to the dragoonings of the Cévennes; the taking of La Rochelle was the preface to the Edict of Nantes.

But, by the side of these general views of the leveling and simplifying minister, which belong to history, the chronicler is obliged to dwell upon the petty objects of the lover and the jealous rival.

Richelieu, as every one knows, had been enamored of the queen. Had this love a purely political aim, or was it one of those profound passions with which Anne of Austria inspired those who were around her? This is what we cannot satisfactorily decide. Yet, at all events, it has been seen, by the circumstances which have been detailed in this history, that Buckingham had gained a superiority over him in more ways than one; and that, especially in the affair of the diamond studs—thanks to the devotion of the three musketeers, and the courage of D'Artagnan—he had most cruelly mystified and befooled him.

It was Richelieu's object, therefore, not merely to rid France of an enemy, but to revenge himself on a rival. The revenge ought, too, to be stern and signal, and completely worthy of the man who held in his hand, as a weapon, the forces of a whole realm.

Richelieu knew, that, in fighting against England, he was fighting against Buckingham; in triumphing over England, he should triumph over Buckingham; and, lastly, that in humiliating England in the eyes of all Europe, he should humiliate Buckingham in the eyes of the queen.

On his part, Buckingham, whilst he was putting the honor of England prominently forward as his motive, was impelled by interests exactly similar to those of the cardinal.

Buckingham was also pursuing a private revenge. Under no pretext had Buckingham been able to enter France as an ambassador; and he wished, therefore, to come in as a conqueror. It follows from this, that the

true stake, in this game which two powerful kingdoms were playing for the pleasure of two men in love, was nothing more than a gentle glance from Anne of Austria.

The Duke of Buckingham gained the first advantage. Arriving unexpectedly before the Isle of Ré, with ninety vessels and twenty thousand men, he surprised the Count de Toirac, who was the king's commander there, and, after a bloody contest, accomplished a disembarkation.

Let us record, by the way, that the Baron de Chantal fell in this combat, leaving an orphan daughter, a little girl eighteen months old. This little girl was afterward Madame de Sévigné.

The Count de Toirac returned to the citadel of St. Martin with his garrison, and threw a hundred men into a small fort, which was called the fort of La Prée.

This event hastened the decision of the cardinal: and until he and the king could go and take the command of the siege of La Rochelle, which was resolved on, he had sent his majesty's brother on forward to direct the first operations, and had made all the troops he could dispose of march to the theatre of war.

It was of this detachment of the army, which was sent forward as a vanguard, that our friend D'Artagnan formed a part. The king, as we have said, was to follow when his court of justice had been held. On rising from the sitting, on the twenty-third of June, he had found himself seized with fever. He, nevertheless, persisted on setting out; but getting worse, he was obliged to stop at Villeroi.

Now, where the king stopped, there also stopped the musketeers. Hence it followed, that D'Artagnan, who was only in the guards, found himself separated, for a time at least, from his good friends, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis. This separation, which was merely annoying to him at the time, would certainly have become a source

of serious anxiety had he been able to discern by what unsuspected dangers he was surrounded.

Nevertheless, he arrived without accident at the camp before La Rochelle.

Everything was in *statu quo*. The Duke of Buckingham and the English in possession of the Isle of Ré continued to besiege, but without success, the fort of La Prée and the citadel of St. Martin: and the hostilities with La Rochelle had commenced two or three days before, on account of a battery which the Duke d'Angoulême had just constructed near the city.

The guards under M. des Essarts, were stationed at the Minimes.

But we know that D'Artagnan, engrossed by the ambition of becoming a musketeer, had formed but few intimacies with his comrades, and he found himself therefore isolated, and abandoned to his own reflections.

And these thoughts were not cheerful. During the year that he had been in Paris, he had engaged himself in public affairs, and consequently his own private affairs, either of love or fortune, had made no great advances.

As to love, the only woman for whom he had a sincere affection was Madame Bonancieux: and Madame Bonancieux had disappeared, nor with all his efforts had he been able to discover what had become of her.

As to fortune, he—a mere nobody—had made an enemy of the cardinal; that is to say, of a man before whom the nobles of the kingdom trembled, and even the king himself stood abashed.

That man had power to crush him, and yet had abstained.

To a mind as clear-sighted as D'Artagnan's, this forbearance was a gleam of dawn which gave promise of a fairer future.

Then, he had made himself another enemy less to be dreaded, as he thought, but one whom he felt instinctively was not to be despised. This enemy was Her Ladyship.

In exchange for all this, he had the protection and good-will of the queen ; but her majesty's good-will in the circumstances of the times, was only an additional source of persecution ; and her protection, it is known, protected very insecurely—witness Chalais and Madame Bonancieux.

So that what he had most manifestly gained, on the whole, was the diamond, worth five or six thousand francs, which he wore upon his finger ; and even this diamond, supposing that he must preserve it, to remind the queen at some future day of her gratitude, had not, in the meantime, since he could not dispose of it, any greater value than the pebbles he trampled beneath his feet. We say the pebbles that he trampled beneath his feet, for D'Artagnan made these reflections whilst he was walking all alone in a pretty little path which led from the camp to an adjoining village. But these reflections had led him further than he intended, and the day was beginning to decline, when, by the last ray of the setting sun, he seemed to perceive the barrel of a musket glittering behind a hedge.

D'Artagnan had a quick eye and a ready wit. He comprehended that the musket had not come there of itself, and that the man who held it was not concealed behind a hedge with any amicable intentions. He determined, therefore, to gain the open country ; but, on the other side of the road, behind a rock, he perceived the extremity of a second musket. It was evidently an ambuscade.

The young man gave a glance at the first musket, and beheld with some anxiety that it was aiming in his

direction; but as soon as he saw the orifice of the barrel motionless, he threw himself upon his face. At that instant the shot was fired, and he heard the whistling of a ball, as it passed over his head.

There was not a single instant to be lost. D'Artagnan raised himself up at a bound, and at the same moment, a bullet from the second musket scattered the stones in the very part of the path where he had thrown himself down.

D'Artagnan was not one of these foolishly brave men who seek a ridiculous death in order to have it said of them that they never retreated a step. Besides, courage had nothing to do with the matter here; he had fallen into an ambuscade.

"If there is a third shot," said he to himself, "I am a dead man."

He immediately scampered toward the camp, with all the swiftness of his countrymen, who are so famous for their activity, but fast as was his course, the one who had fired first, having had time to reload his gun, made another shot at him, so well directed this time, that the ball passed through his hat, and lifted it ten paces before his flying feet.

As D'Artagnan had not another hat he picked it up as he ran; and reaching his lodging, pale and out of breath, he sat down, without speaking to any one, and began to reflect.

This event might have three causes. The first, and most natural, was, that it might be an ambuscade from La Rochelle, whose inmates would not have been sorry to kill one of his majesty's guards, as it would make one enemy the less, and that enemy might have a well-filled purse in his pocket.

D'Artagnan took his hat and examined the hole that the bullet had made and shook his head. The bullet did

not belong to a musket, but to an arquebuse; the precision of the aim had already made him think it was fired by a private hand; so it was not a military ambuscade, since the ball was not of that caliber.

It *might* be an affectionate memento from the cardinal. It may be remembered that at the very moment when, thanks to the ever-blessed beam of sunshine, he had perceived the gun-barrel, he was marveling at the long-suffering of his eminence towards him. But D'Artagnan shook his head with an air of doubt. The cardinal seldom had recourse to such means, with people whom a flourish of his pen could crush.

It might be Her Ladyship's revenge.

This conjecture was more reasonable.

He tried in vain to recall either the features or the dress of the assassins, but he had hurried from them too rapidly to have leisure to remark them.

"Ah! my poor friends," muttered D'Artagnan, "where are you? Alas! how much I miss you!"

D'Artagnan passed a very bad night. Three or four times he awoke with a start, fancying that a man approached his bed to stab him. Yet the day dawned, without any accident having occurred during the darkness.

But D'Artagnan suspected that what is deferred is not therefore an impossibility.

He remained in his quarters throughout the whole day; and gave, as an excuse to himself, the badness of the weather.

At nine o'clock the next morning, they beat to arms. The Duc d'Orleans was visiting the posts. The guards mustered, and D'Artagnan took his place amidst his comrades.

His royal highness passed in front of the line; and then all the superior officers approached to pay their respects

to him. M. des Essarts, the captain of the guards, went with the others.

After a short time, D'Artagnan thought that he perceived M. des Essarts making a sign to him to draw near. He waited for another gesture, fearing that he might have been mistaken; but on its being repeated, he left the ranks, and advanced to receive the order.

"His Royal Highness is about to ask for volunteers for a dangerous expedition which will be very glorious for those who survive it; and I made you a sign, that you might hold yourself in readiness."

"Thank you, captain," replied D'Artagnan, who required nothing better than to distinguish himself before the eyes of the lieutenant-general.

The Rochellais had, in fact, made a sortie during the night, and recaptured a bastion which the royal army had seized two days before. The point was to push a forlorn hope so forward, as to be able to discover in what manner the enemy guarded this bastion.

After a few minutes his royal highness raised his voice and said:

"I want three or four volunteers for this expedition, led by a man who can be depended upon."

"As for your trustworthy man, here he is," said M. des Essarts, pointing to D'Artagnan; "and as for the four or five volunteers, your royal highness has only to make your wishes known, and the men will not be wanting."

"Four volunteers to come and be killed with me!" cried D'Artagnan, raising his sword.

Two of his companions in the guards rushed toward him instantaneously; and two soldiers having joined him, the number was complete. D'Artagnan, therefore, rejected all others, to avoid injustice to those who had the prior claim.

It was not known whether the Rochellais, after having taken the bastion, had evacuated, or placed a garrison in it. It was therefore necessary to examine the spot sufficiently close to ascertain this point.

D'Artagnan went off with his four companions in the line of the trench. The two guards marched by his side and the two soldiers in the rear.

Sheltering themselves in this manner by the rampart, they arrived within a hundred paces of the bastion ; and on turning round at that moment, D'Artagnan perceived that the two soldiers had disappeared. Believing them to have remained behind from fear, he continued to advance.

At the turn of the counterscarp, they found themselves about sixty yards from the bastion ; but they saw no one, and the bastion seemed abandoned.

The three volunteers deliberated whether they should advance further, when suddenly a circle of smoke surrounded the vast stone, and a dozen balls whistled around D'Artagnan and his companions.

They knew now what they had come to learn ; the bastion was guarded ; a longer delay, therefore, in so dangerous a place, would have been only a gratuitous imprudence. So D'Artagnan and the two guards turned their heads, and began a retreat which was very much like a flight.

On reaching the angle of the trench, which would serve as a rampart to them, one of the guards fell with a ball through his chest, whilst the other, who was safe and sound, made the best of his way to the camp.

D'Artagnan would not thus abandon a companion, and leaned over him to lift him up, and aid him to regain the lines ; but at that very moment two shots were fired ; one ball shattered the head of the man who was already wounded, and the other was flattened against a rock, after

having passed within two inches of D'Artagnan's body.

The musketeer turned instantly; for this attack could not come from the bastion, which was hidden by the angle of the trench. The remembrance of the two soldiers who had abandoned him occurred to his mind, and suggested to him his assassins of the previous evening. He resolved, on this occasion, to find out what it meant; and fell, therefore, upon the body of his comrade, as though he had been dead. He immediately saw that two heads were raised above an abandoned work, which was about thirty yards from him; they were those of the two soldiers. D'Artagnan was not mistaken: these men had followed him solely for the purpose of assassinating him, in the full belief that the murder of the young man would be imputed to the muskets of the enemy.

But as he might be only wounded, and might denounce their crime, they drew near to complete their work. Happily, deceived by the sight of D'Artagnan's position, they neglected to re-load their guns. When they were about three paces from him, D'Artagnan, who had taken especial care, in falling, not to relinquish his sword, suddenly arose, and sprang beside them.

The assassins were well aware that if they fled toward the camp without having killed their man, they should be accused by him; and therefore their first impulse was to pass over to the enemy. One of them took his gun by the barrel and made use of it as a club; he dealt a terrible blow at D'Artagnan, who avoided it by jumping aside; by this movement, however, he opened a passage for the bandit, who immediately sprang forth towards the bastion. But as the Rochellais who guarded it were ignorant of his intentions in advancing, they fired upon him and he fell, with his shoulder broken by a ball.

In the meantime D'Artagnan threw himself on the second soldier with his sword. The struggle was not

long. This wretch had only his discharged fuses to defend himself with. The sword of the guardsman glided along the barrel of this useless weapon, and passed through the assassin's thigh. As soon as he had fallen, D'Artagnan applied the point of his weapon to his throat.

"Oh, do not kill me!" exclaimed the bandit. "Pardon, pardon, sir, and I will confess everything!"

"Is it worth my while to grant you your life for your secret?" demanded the young man.

"Yes, if you consider life of any value to a man of twenty-two years of age, who, being as handsome and as brave as you are, may accomplish anything."

"Wretch!" cried D'Artagnan, "speak instantly. Who employed you to assassinate me?"

"A woman whom I do not know, but who was called 'My Lady.'"

"But if you do not know this woman, how came you to know her name?"

"My comrade knew her, and called her thus. It was with him that she arranged the business—not with me. He has a letter from this person now in his pocket which would be of great importance to you, according to what I heard him say."

"But how came you to be his partner in this ambuscade?"

"He proposed to me to join him in it, and I agreed."

"And how much has she paid you for this enchanting expedition?"

"A hundred louis."

"Well, upon my word," said the young man, laughing, "she thinks me of some value. A hundred louis! It is quite a fortune for two wretches like you. I can well understand that you would accept it; and so I forgive you, but on one condition."

"What is that?" said the soldier, uneasy at discovering that all was not yet ended.

"That you go and get me the letter out of your companion's pocket."

"But," exclaimed the bandit, "that is only another way of killing me. How can you ask me to go for the letter, under the very fire of the bastion?"

"But you must make up your mind to go for it, or I swear that you shall this moment die by my sword."

"Mercy, sir! mercy, in the name of the young lady whom you love, and whom perhaps you imagine dead, and who is not so," screamed the bandit, throwing himself on his hand: for his strength was ebbing with his blood.

"And how do you know that there is a young lady whom I love, and that I have believed her dead?" demanded D'Artagnan.

"By that letter in my comrade's pocket."

"You see then, that I must have that letter," said D'Artagnan. "So, let us have no longer delay, no more hesitation, or, whatever may be my repugnance to bathe my sword a second time in the blood of such a villain as yourself, I swear to you, on the word of an honest man——"

At these words D'Artagnan made such a threatening gesture, that the wounded man arose.

"Stop! stop!" exclaimed he, recovering courage through the very force of fear: "I go—I go."

D'Artagnan took the soldier's arquebus, made him walk in front, and urged him at the same time toward his companion, by pricking him in the loins with the point of his sword.

It was a fearful spectacle to witness this unhappy being leaving a long track of blood upon the path he took, growing pale from the approach of death, and yet

striving to drag himself, without being seen, to the body of his accomplice, which was stretched out at a distance of twenty yards.

Terror was so depicted on his countenance, which was covered with an icy dampness, that D'Artagnan both pitied and despised him.

"Come!" said he, "I will show you the difference between a man of courage and a coward! Wait where you are: I will go!" And with an active step, and his eye upon the bastion, observing the proceedings of the enemy, and availing himself of every inequality of ground, he managed to reach the fallen soldier.

There were two methods of accomplishing his purpose: either to search him where he was: or to carry him away, making a buckler of his body, and then to search him in the trench.

D'Artagnan preferred the second plan, and had thrown the body of the assassin on his shoulders just at the very moment that the enemy fired.

A slight tremor, a final cry, and a shudder of agony, proved to D'Artagnan that he who had sought to assassinate him, had now saved his life.

D'Artagnan reached the trench and threw the body by the side of the wounded man, who was as pale now as the dead one.

He then began to take the inventory. There was a leathern pocket-book, a purse, which evidently contained a part of the blood-money the banditti had received, and a dice-box and dice; and these composed the inheritance of the dead man.

He left the dice-box and dice where they had fallen, threw the purse to the wounded man, and eagerly opened the pocketbook.

Amongst several unimportant papers, he found the

following letter: it was that which he had gone to search for at the hazard of his life:

“Since you have lost track of that woman, and she is now in safety in the convent, which you never ought to have allowed her to reach, take care at any rate not to miss *the man*; otherwise, you know that I have a long arm, and you shall pay dearly for the hundred louis which you have of mine.”

There was no signature.

Nevertheless, it was evident that the letter was from My Lady.

He kept it, therefore, as a testimony against her; and finding himself in safety behind the angle of the trench, he began to question the wounded man. The latter confessed that he had been engaged with his comrade, the same who had now been killed, to carry off a young woman, who was to leave Paris by the barrier of La Vilette; but that, having stopped to drink at a wine shop, they had been ten minutes too late for the carriage.

“But what were you to have done with this woman?” demanded D’Artagnan, in an agony.

“We were to have taken her to an hotel in the Place Royale,” said the wounded man.

“Yes, yes,” muttered D’Artagnan, “that is it: to Her Ladyship herself.”

The young man shuddered as he comprehended with how atrocious a lust for vengeance this woman was impelled to destroy him, and those who loved him; and how well she was acquainted with the secrets of the court, since she had detected even this. For this exact information she was indebted to the cardinal.

But, as some degree of compensation, he ascertained with unfeigned joy that the queen had at last discovered the prison to which Madame Bonancieux had been sent

to expiate her devotedness, and had already rescued her from it. Thus the letter, which he had received from the young woman, and her appearance in the carriage on the Chaillot road, were explained to him.

Thenceforth, as Athos had predicted, it was possible to find Madame Bonancieux again, and a convent was not impregnable.

This idea disposed his heart to clemency. He turned toward the wounded man, who was glaring at every change of his countenance with agony and stretching out his arm to him :

“ Come,” said he, “ I will not abandon you here. Rest on me, and let us return to the camp.”

“ Yes,” said the wounded man, who could hardly credit so much magnanimity ; “ but is it not to have me hanged ? ”

“ You have my word,” replied he, “ for the second time I grant you your life.”

The wounded man fell on his knees, and kissed the feet of his preserver ; but D’Artagnan, who had no longer any motive for remaining so near the enemy himself, cut short these tokens of his gratitude.

The guard who had returned at the first discharge from the bastion had announced the death of his four companions. There was, therefore, both great astonishment and great joy in the regiment, when they saw the young man returning safe and sound.

D’Artagnan explained the sword-wound of his companion by a sortie, which he invented. He recounted the death of the other soldier, and the perils they had run. This account was the occasion of a genuine triumph. For one day the whole army spoke of this expedition ; and his royal highness himself sent to compliment our musketeer upon his gallant conduct.

And lastly, as every good action brings its recompense

with it, that of D'Artagnan had the happy result of restoring to him the tranquillity that he had lost. In fact, the young man thought that he might cease to be disturbed, since of his two enemies, one was killed, and the other devoted to his interests.

This tranquillity, however, proved one thing—that D'Artagnan did not yet thoroughly know My Lady.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE WINE OF ANJOU.

AFTER almost hopeless accounts of the king, the report of his recovery began to spread through the camp ; and as he was in great haste to reach the siege in person, it was said that he would set out as soon as he could mount his horse.

In the meantime his royal highness—who knew that he should soon be superseded, either by the Duc d'Angoulême, or by Bassompierre, or by Schomberg, who were disputing with one another for the command—did but little, lost his time in petty attacks, and dared not hazard any great enterprise to drive the English from the Isle of Ré, where they besieged the citadel of St. Martin, and the Fort de la Prée ; whilst the French, on their side, were besieging La Rochelle.

D'Artagnan, as we have said, had become now easy in his mind, as always happens after a danger past when danger seems to have entirely vanished.

Yet one anxiety still remained to him, which was, that he received no tidings of his friends.

But one morning explanation reached him, in the shape of the following letter, dated from Villeroi :

“ M. D'ARTAGNAN,—Messrs. Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, after having had a capital dinner party at my house, and enjoyed themselves very much, made so great a noise, that the provost of the castle, who is a strict dis-

ciplinarian, put them in confinement for a few days. I must, nevertheless, execute the orders that they gave me, to send you a dozen bottles of my Anjou wine, which they greatly admired. They hope that you will drink to their healths, in their own favorite wine.

“I have done this: and am, sir, with great respect,
your most obedient, humble servant, GODEAU,
“The host of Messieurs the Musketeers.”

“Good!” exclaimed D’Artagnan; “they think of me amidst their pleasures, as I have thought of them in my weariness. Sure enough I will drink to them, and with all my heart, too, but not alone.”

And D’Artagnan hastened to the quarters of the two guards, with whom he had become more intimate than with any of the others, to invite them to come and drink some of the delicious wine of Anjou, which had just arrived from Villeroi.

One of the two guards was to be on duty in the evening, and the other on the morrow; so the meeting was arranged for the day after.

D’Artagnan sent his dozen of wine to the mess-room of the guards, desiring to have it kept with care; and on the day of the entertainment, as the dinner was fixed for twelve o’clock, he sent Planchet at nine to get everything prepared.

Planchet, elated at this exaltation to the dignity of butler, determined to perform his duties like an intelligent man. To effect this, he called in the aid of the valet of one of his master’s guests, by name Fournéau, and also that of the pretended soldier who had sought to slay our hero, and who, belonging to no regiment, had, since the Gascon spared his life, entered into D’Artagnan’s service, or rather, into Planchet’s.

The appointed dinner-hour being come, the two guests

arrived and took their places, and the dishes were arranged upon the table. Planchet waited, with a napkin on his arm; Fourneau uncorked the bottles; and Brisemont, for that was the convalescent's name, decanted the wine, which seemed to have been somewhat disturbed by the shaking of the journey. The first bottle being slightly thick toward the bottom, Brisemont poured the last of it into a wine-glass, and D'Artagnan permitted him to drink it, for the poor wretch was still very weak.

The guests, having finished their soup, were just carrying the first glass of wine to their lips, when suddenly the cannon sounded from Fort Louis and Fort Neuf. The guards, thinking that there was some unexpected attack, either from the besieged, or from the English, immediately seized their swords: D'Artagnan did the same, and the three hastened out toward their posts.

But scarcely were they out of the mess-room before they found the reason of this great noise. Cries of "Long live the king!" "Long live the cardinal!" re-echoed on every side, and drums were beating in all directions.

In fact, the king, in his impatience, had taken such measures that he had at that moment arrived with a reinforcement of ten thousand men. His musketeers preceded and followed him. D'Artagnan, placed in line with his company, with an expressive gesture saluted his friends and M. de Treville, who recognized him immediately.

The ceremony of reception being ended, the four friends were soon united.

"Egad!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, "you could not have arrived in better time: the dinner will not have had even time to get cold. Is it not so, gentlemen?" added the young man, turning to the two guards, whom he presented to his friends.

"Ah! ah!" said Porthos, "it appears that you were feasting."

"I hope," said Aramis, "that there are no ladies at your dinner."

"Is there anything that is drinkable in this paltry place?" said Athos.

"Why, zounds! there is your own wine, my dear friend," answered D'Artagnan.

"Our wine?" said Athos, in astonishment.

"Yes, that which you sent me."

"Wine that we sent you?"

"Yes, you know very well: that wine from the hills of Anjou."

"I know that wine you are talking of—"

"Your favorite wine—"

"Ay, when I have neither champagne nor chambertin."

"Well, in the absence of champagne and chambertin, you must be content with that."

"And so we, high-livers as we are, have sent you some wine, have we?" said Porthos.

"No, but it is the wine which was sent me by your orders."

"By our orders?" said the musketeers.

"Did you send the wine, Aramis?" inquired Athos.

"No; did you, Porthos?"

"No; did you, Athos?"

"No."

"If it was not you," said D'Artagnan, "it was your host."

"Our host?"

"Yes, your host—Godeau, at Villeroi."

"Faith, let come from whom it may, no matter!" said Porthos. "Let us taste it, and if good, let us drink it."

"No," said Athos, "let us not drink wine without in the least knowing whence it comes."

"You are right, Athos," said D'Artagnan. "Did none of you direct the host, Godeau, to send me the wine?"

"No; and yet he sent you some in our names?"

"Here is the letter," said D'Artagnan, and he presented the letter to his companions.

"It is not his writing," said Athos; "I know it, for it was I who, before we left, settled our joint account."

"A forged letter!" said Porthos, indignantly; "we have not been in prison."

"D'Artagnan," said Aramis, in a tone of reproach, "how could you believe that we had become obstreperous?"

D'Artagnan grew suddenly pale, and a convulsive trembling shook his limbs.

"You frighten me," said Athos; "what can have occurred?"

"Let us run, my friends, let us run," said D'Artagnan; "a horrible suspicion comes across my mind. Can this, too, be another of that woman's acts of vengeance?"

It was now Athos who, in his turn, grew pale.

D'Artagnan sprang toward the mess-room, followed by the three musketeers and the two guards.

The first object which struck D'Artagnan's sight on entering the room was Brisemont, extended on the floor, writhing in horrible convulsions. Planchet and Forneau, looking as pale as corpses, were endeavoring to assist him; but it was evident all aid was useless; the features of the dying man were contracted from agony.

"Ah!" cried he, when he perceived D'Artagnan, "you pretended to forgive and now you poison me!"

"I, wretched man! I," exclaimed the young man, "what can you mean?"

"I say that it is you who gave me the wine, and it is you who told me to drink it. You wanted to take your revenge—oh it is too dreadful!"

"Do not think so, Brisemont," said D'Artagnan, "for I swear——"

"Oh! but God is there—God will punish you! My God! may you one day suffer what I suffer now!"

"Upon the gospel," cried D'Artagnan, rushing toward the dying man, "I swear that I knew not that this wine was poisoned, and that I was about to drink it as well as yourself."

"I do not believe you," exclaimed the soldier; and he expired in terrific tortures.

"Horrible! horrible!" muttered Athos; whilst Porthos broke the bottles; and Aramis—rather late, it must be confessed—sent off for a confessor.

"Oh! my friends," said D'Artagnan, "you have once more saved my life: and not mine only, but the liyes of these gentlemen also. Gentlemen," continued he addressing the guards, "may I request your silence concerning this adventure? Persons of high condition may be implicated in what you have now seen, and the misery of it all would fall upon us."

"Ah! sir," stammered out Planchet, more dead than alive; "ah! sir, what a narrow escape I have had!"

"What, you rascal!" cried D'Artagnan, "were you going to drink my wine?"

"To the king's health, sir; I was going to drink one little glass, if Fournéau, had not said that some one called me."

"Alas!" said Fournéau, whose teeth were chattering with fright, "I wanted to get rid of him that I might drink some myself."

"Gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, addressing the guards, "you must be sensible that our entertainment would be but a melancholy affair after what has passed. I beseech you, therefore, to receive my excuses, and let us postpone till some other day."

The two guards courteously accepted these apologies ; and, understanding that the four friends wished to be alone, they took their leave.

When the young guard and the three musketeers were by themselves, they looked at one another for an instant, in a way that proved how well they understood the seriousness of their situation.

“First,” said Athos, “let us leave this room : a dead man is but sorry company.”

“Planchet,” said D’Artagnan, “I recommend you to look to the body of this poor devil, and see that it is buried in consecrated ground. He committed an awful crime, it is true : but he had repented of it.”

Having intrusted the funeral rites of Brisemont to Planchet and Fourneau, the four friends quitted the room.

The host gave them another chamber, and furnished them with eggs, while Athos himself fetched water for them from the fountain. Aramis and Porthos were, in a few words, informed of all that had occurred.

“Well !” said D’Artagnan to Athos, “you see, my dear friend, it is war to the death !”

Athos shook his head. “Yes, yes,” said he, “I see it well enough : but are you sure that it is she ?”

“I am quite sure.”

“Nevertheless, I confess that I have still some doubts.”

“But that fleur-de-lis upon the shoulder ?”

“It is an Englishwoman who has committed some crime in France, and has been branded in consequence.”

“Athos, it is your wife, I tell you,” repeated D’Artagnan. “Do you not remember how the two marks agree ?”

“And yet I should have thought that *she* was dead—I so completely hanged her !”

It was D’Artagnan who shook his head this time.

"But after all, what is to be done?" said the young man.

"The fact is, that it is impossible to remain in this manner, with a sword always suspended over one's head," replied Athos; "and you must get free from such a situation."

"But how?"

"Listen: try to find her, and to come to some understanding with her. Say to her—' Peace or war? On the honor of a gentleman. I will never say one word, or take one step, to injure you. On your part, give me a solemn oath to remain neutral with respect to me. If not, I will go to the chancellor, to the king, and to the executioner; I will excite the court against you, and will declare you branded; I will cause you to be tried: and, if you are acquitted, well, then, on the word of a gentleman, I will kill you myself, as I would a mad dog.'"

"I like this plan well enough," said D'Artagnan; "but how am I to find her?"

"Time, my dear friend, time brings opportunity: opportunity is man's special providence. The more a man has embarked, the more he gains, when he knows how to wait."

"Yes; but to wait surrounded by assassins and poisoners."

"Bah!" said Athos: "God has preserved you hitherto, and He will, probably, condescend to preserve you still."

"Yes. Besides, we are men, and after all, it is our business to risk our lives; but she?" added D'Artagnan, in a low voice.

"And who is she?" asked Athos.

"Constance."

"Madame Bonancieux? Ah! it is true," said Athos. "Poor fellow! I forgot you were in love."

"Well," said Aramis, "but did you not see, by the

very letter that you found on the wretch who was killed, that she was in a convent. One is quite safe in a convent; and as soon as the siege of La Rochelle is ended I promise you, on my part——”

“Good!” said Athos, “good! Yes, my dear Aramis, we know that your views all tend toward religion.”

“I am only a musketeer in the meantime,” said Aramis, meekly.

“It would seem that he has not heard from his mistress for a long while,” said Athos, in a whisper, to D’Artagnan; “but don’t say anything—we are certain of it.”

“Well,” said Porthos, “it seems to me there is a very simple way.”

“And what is that?” demanded D’Artagnan.

“She is in a convent, you say?” continued Porthos.

“Yes.”

“Well, as soon as the siege is raised, we will get her out of this convent.”

“But, first, we must know what convent she is in.”

“Ah, that is true,” said Porthos.

“But, do you not say, my dear D’Artagnan,” said Athos, “that it is the queen who chose this convent for her?”

“Yes. I believe so, at least.”

“Well, then, Porthos will help us in that case.”

“How so, pray?”

“Why, through your marchioness, or duchess, or princess; she ought to have a long arm.”

“Hush!” said Porthos, putting his fingers on his lips; “I fancy she is a cardinalist, and she must know nothing about it.”

“Then,” said Aramis, “I will undertake to get some intelligence of her.”

“ You, Aramis ? ” exclaimed the three friends ; “ you—and how so ? ”

“ Through the queen’s almoner, with whom I am intimate,” answered Aramis, blushing.

On this assurance the four friends, who had ended their simple repast, separated, with the promise of meeting again the same evening. D’Artagnan returned to the Minimes, and the three musketeers went to the king’s quarters, where they had still to provide themselves with lodgings.

CHAPTER XLIII.

AT THE SIGN OF THE RED DOVE-COTE.

ALMOST as soon as he had reached the camp, the king—who was in great haste to confront the enemy, and who participated in the cardinal's hatred of Buckingham—wished to complete the preparations, first for driving the English from the Isle of Ré, and then for pressing on the siege of La Rochelle. But, in spite of all his efforts, he was retarded by the dissensions which broke out between De Bassompierre and Schomberg against the Duke of Angoulême.

Schomberg and De Bassompierre were marshals of France, and insisted on their right to command the army under the superintendence of the king; but the cardinal, apprehensive that Bassompierre, who was a Huguenot at heart, might fight but feebly against the English and the Rochellais, who were his brethren in faith, supported the Duke of Angoulême, whom the king had, at his instigation, already made lieutenant-general. The result was, that, with the alternative of seeing Schomberg and De Bassompierre desert the army, they were compelled to give each a separate command. Bassompierre took his station to the north of the city, from La Leu to Dompierre; the Duke of Angoulême took his to the east, from Dompierre to Perigny; and Schomberg, to the south, from Perigny to Angoutin.

His royal highness fixed his quarters at Dompierre;

the king was sometimes at Estre, and sometimes at La Jarrie; and the cardinal established himself at a simple house, without any intrenchment, at Pont de la Pierre upon the downs.

Thus his royal highness overlooked Bassompierre; the king, the Duke of Angoulême; and the cardinal, M. de Schomberg.

As soon as this arrangement had been established, they occupied themselves in driving the English from the Island.

The conjuncture was admirable. The English—who, above all things, required to be well fed in order to prove good soldiers—getting now nothing but salted provisions and weevilly biscuits, had many invalids in their camp; and, moreover, the sea—which was, at that season of the year, highly dangerous on all the western coast—was every day disastrous to some small vessel or other, and the shore, from the point of L'Aiguillon to the trenches, was literally strewed at every tide with the wrecks of pinnaces, cutters and feluccas. The result was, that should the king's troops even keep within their camp, Buckingham, who only remained in the Isle of Ré from obstinacy, would be sooner or later forced to run the gauntlet.

But, as M. de Toirac announced that everything was preparing in the enemy's camp for a new assault, the king concluded on adopting final measures, and issued the necessary orders for a decisive affair.

Our intention being not to make a journal of the siege, but merely to record those events in it which bear upon this history, we shall be contented with stating that the enterprise succeeded to the great satisfaction of the king, and the great glory of the cardinal. The English, beaten back foot by foot, vanquished in every encounter, decimated in their passage from the Isle, were compelled to

re-embark, leaving on the field of battle two thousand men, amongst whom were five colonels, three lieutenant-colonels, two hundred and fifty captains, and twenty gentlemen of quality, as well as four pieces of cannon and sixty flags, which were conveyed to Paris by Claude de Saint Simon, and floated with great pomp from the arched roof of Notre Dame.

To Deums were sung in the camp, and soon spread themselves from thence throughout the whole of France.

The cardinal was thus at liberty to carry on the siege, without having, at least for the time being, any reason to be apprehensive of the English.

But, as we have just hinted, the security was only momentary. An envoy of the Duke of Buckingham, whose name was Montague, having been seized, they found upon him proofs of a league between the Empire, Spain, England, and Lorraine. This league was formed against France.

Still further, in Buckingham's quarters, which he had been forced to abandon precipitately, there had been found papers confirming—as the cardinal declares in his memoirs—the existence of this league, and compromising greatly Madame de Chevreuse, and, consequently, the queen.

It was upon the cardinal that all the responsibility rested; for a man can never be an absolute minister without being responsible. On this account, all the resources of his vast genius were exerted by night and day, and strained to comprehend the slightest movement that occurred in the great realms of Europe.

The cardinal was well aware of the activity, and, above all, of the animosity of Buckingham. If the league which threatened France should triumph, all his influence was lost. The policies of Spain and Aus-

tria would have each its representatives in the cabinet at the Louvre, where they had as yet only partisans. He, Richelieu, the French minister, the minister emphatically national, would be ruined: and the king, who, even whilst he was obeying him like a child, disliked him as a child dislikes its master, would abandon him to the united vengeance of his Royal Highness and the queen. He should be ruined himself, and very likely France along with him; and these were disasters that he was bound to circumvent.

On this account were seen couriers, becoming more numerous every instant, succeeding each other by night and by day, at the small house on the Pont de la Pierre, in which the cardinal had fixed his quarters.

There were monks, who wore the habit so ill that it was easy to recognize them as belonging to the church militant; women, a little awkward in their pages' costume, the looseness of whose dresses did not entirely conceal their rounded forms; and countrymen, with blackened hands, but fine limbs, who might be known for men of quality at the distance of a league.

Other visitors, too, there were, more dangerous, for it had been two or three times reported that the cardinal had narrowly escaped assassination. It is true that the enemies of his eminence declared, that it was he himself who subsidized these unskillful assassins, so that he might on occasion have an ostensible right of retaliation; but we should believe altogether neither what ministers say nor what their enemies aver.

Yet this did not prevent the cardinal, whose most violent detractors never called in question his personal courage, from making many nocturnal expeditions: sometimes to communicate important orders to the Duke of Angoulême, sometimes to hold council with the king,

and at others to confer with some messenger, whom he did not choose to have admitted at his own abode.

The musketeers, on their part, not having much to occupy them in the siege, were not very strictly controlled, and led a merry life. This was the more easy to our three companions, inasmuch as, being friends of M. de Treville, they readily obtained from him special permissions to absent themselves, even after the hour of the evening drum.

Now, one night, when D'Artagnan, who was in the trenches, could not accompany them, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, mounted on their chargers, enveloped in their uniform cloaks, and with their hands on the butt-ends of their pistols, were returning together from a tavern, which Athos had discovered two days before on the La Jarrie road, and which was called the Red Dove-cote. They were proceeding on the road toward the camp, keeping a bright look-out ahead for fear of an ambuscade, when, about a quarter of a league from the village of Boisnau, they thought they heard the sound of horses coming toward them. They immediately halted, in close rank, and waited, keeping in the middle of the road. After a short time, and just as the moon emerged from behind a cloud, they saw, coming round the corner of the road, two horsemen, who, upon perceiving them, halted also, appearing to deliberate whether they should advance or retreat. This hesitation excited the suspicion of our three friends ; and Athos, advancing a few paces, cried out, in his firm voice :

“ Who goes there ? ”

“ Who goes there, yourselves ? ” replied one of the horsemen.

“ That is no answer ! ” exclaimed Athos. “ Who goes there ? Answer, or we charge.”

“ Take care what you are about, gentlemen,” said a

sonorous voice, which appeared to be accustomed to command.

"It is some officer of rank who is making his night rounds," said Athos, turning toward his companions.

"What will you do, gentlemen?"

"Who are you?" said the same voice, in the same commanding tone. "Reply, or you may find yourselves in trouble for your disobedience."

"King's musketeers!" answered Athos, more than ever convinced that he who questioned him had the right to do so.

"Of what company?"

"Company of Treville."

"Advance, and give an account of what you are doing here at this time of night."

The three companions advanced, with their ears a little drooping, for they were all now convinced that they had to deal with one more powerful than themselves. They left Athos to be their spokesman.

One of the two horsemen—he who had spoken the second time—was about ten paces from his companion. Athos made a sign to Porthos and Aramis to remain in the same manner in the rear, and advanced alone.

"Excuse us, sir," said Athos, "but we did not know who you were, and you may see that we kept a good look out."

"Your name?" said the officer, who covered part of his face with his cloak.

"But you, yourself, sir," said Athos, who began to be indignant at this questioning, "give me, I beg, some proof that you have the right thus to question me."

"Your name?" said the horseman a second time, letting his cloak fall, so that his countenance might be seen.

"The cardinal!" cried the astounded musketeer.

"Your name!" a third time repeated Richelieu.

“Athos,” said he.

The cardinal made a sign to his equerry, who approached him.

“These three musketeers will follow us,” said he in a low voice: “I do not wish it to be known that I have left the camp; and, if they follow us, we shall be certain that they will not tell any one.”

“We are gentlemen, my lord,” said Athos; “ask us for our words, and do not be in doubt about us. Thank God, we know how to keep a secret.”

The cardinal fixed his piercing eyes upon the bold speaker.

“You have a fine ear, M. Athos,” said the cardinal, “but listen to this; it is not through distrust that I request you to follow me: it is for my own security. Undoubtedly your two companions are Messrs. Porthos and Aramis?”

“Yes, your eminence,” said Athos, whilst the two musketeers came forward, hat in hand.

“I know you, gentlemen,” said the cardinal; “I know you, I am aware that you are not entirely my friends, and I am sorry for it; but I know that you are brave and loyal gentlemen, and that you may be safely trusted. M. Athos, do me the honor, therefore to accompany me, with your two friends, and then I shall have an escort which might excite the envy of his majesty, if we should meet him.”

The three musketeers bowed to the very necks of their horses.

“Well, then, upon my honor,” said Athos, “your eminence is right to take us with you. We have met some fearful faces on the road, and we even had a quarrel with four of them at the Red Dove-cote.”

“A quarrel! And on what account, gentleman?” said the cardinal. “I do not like squabbling, you know.”

" That is exactly why I have the honor to warn your eminence of what has just happened ; for you might hear it from others, and, from a false report, might be induced to believe that we had been in fault."

" And what were the results of this quarrel ? " demanded the cardinal, frowning.

" Why, my friend Aramis there has received a slight wound in the arm, which however, as your eminence may see, will not hinder him from mounting the assault, to-morrow, if your eminence commands the attack."

" But you are not the kind of men to take wounds in that way," said the cardinal. " Come, be frank, gentlemen : you certainly gave some in return : confess yourselves ; you know that I have the right to give absolution."

" I, my lord," said Athos, " did not even draw my sword ; but I took him with whom I was engaged up in my arms, and threw him out of the window ; and," continued Athos, with some slight hesitation, " I fancy that, in falling, he broke his leg."

" Ah, ah ! " said the cardinal ; " and you, M. Porthos ? "

" I, my lord, knowing that dueling is forbidden, seized a bench and gave one of those brigands a blow, which I imagine broke his arm."

" Very good," said the cardinal ; " and you, M. Aramis ? "

" I, my lord, as I am naturally very gentle, and am, besides, as your eminence perhaps does not know, on the point of taking orders, I wanted to lead away my companions, when one of these wretches treacherously stabbed me through the left arm ; my patience then failed me, I drew my sword in turn, and, as he returned to the charge, I almost think I felt, as he threw himself upon me, that the weapon passed through his body. I only know that he fell and was carried away with his two companions."

“The deuce, gentlemen!” said the cardinal: “three men disabled in a tavern quarrel! You have pretty active hands. But, by the way, what was the cause of the quarrel?”

“These wretches were drunk,” said Athos, “and knowing that a lady had arrived at the tavern that evening, they wanted to force her door.”

“And was this woman young and pretty?” demanded the cardinal, with some anxiety.

“We did not see her, my lord,” replied Athos.

“You did not see her? Ah! very good!” briskly replied the cardinal; “you did right to defend the honor of a woman; and as I am myself going down to the Red Dove-cote, I shall find out whether you have told me the truth.”

“My lord,” proudly replied Athos, “we are gentlemen, and would not tell a lie to save our lives.”

“Nor do I doubt what you have told me, M. Athos—I do not doubt it for one moment; but,” added he, to change the conversation, “was this lady alone?”

“The lady had a cavalier shut up with her; but as he did not show himself, in spite of the noise, it is to be presumed that he is a coward.”

“‘Judge not rashly,’ says the Gospel,” replied the cardinal.

Athos bowed.

“And now, gentleman,” said Richelieu, “I know what I wanted; follow me.”

The three musketeers fell behind the cardinal, who again covered his face with his cloak, and went forward, keeping himself eight or ten paces before his companions.

They soon arrived at the silent, solitary tavern. The landlord was unquestionably aware what an illustrious visitor was expected, and had packed off all troublesome persons.

Ten paces before he reached the door, the cardinal made a sign to his equerry, and to the three musketeers, to halt. A ready-saddled horse was fastened to the shutter. The cardinal knocked three times, in a peculiar manner.

A man, enveloped in a cloak, came out directly, and quickly exchanged a few words with the cardinal; after which he mounted the horse, and went off toward Sur-gères, which was also the road to Paris.

"Come forward, gentlemen," said the cardinal. "I find that you have told me the truth, and it will not be my fault if our meeting this evening should not turn out to your advantage. In the meantime, follow me."

Richelieu dismounted, and the three musketeers did the same. The cardinal cast his bridle over the arm of his equerry, and the musketeers fastened theirs to the shutters. The landlord stood on the step of his door—to him the cardinal was only an officer coming to visit a lady.

"Have you any chamber on the ground-floor, where these gentlemen may wait for me, by a good fire?" inquired the cardinal.

The landlord opened the door of a large room, where a sorry, closed iron stove had lately been replaced by a large and excellent chimney.

"How is this?" replied he.

"That will do very well," said the cardinal. "Enter, gentlemen, and be pleased to wait for me here; I shall not be more than half an hour."

And, whilst the three musketeers entered the chamber on the ground-floor, the cardinal, without requiring any direction, ascended the stairs like a man who has no need to be told the way.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE UTILITY OF STOVE FUNNELS.

IT was evident that, without knowing it, and moved solely by their chivalrous and adventurous character, our three friends had rendered a service to some one whom the cardinal honored with his own special protection.

But who was that some one? This was the question which our three musketeers first asked themselves. Finding that none of the replies which their intelligence suggested were satisfactory, Porthos called the landlord and asked him for some dice.

Porthos and Aramis placed themselves at a table and began to play, whilst Athos walked up and down the room in deep thought.

As he walked and meditated, he passed and repassed before the funnel of the former stove which had been half broken off, and the other end of which led into the apartment above. Each time that he passed he heard the murmur of speech, which at last attracted his attention. Athos approached, and distinguished some words which certainly appeared to deserve so much attention that he made signs to his two companions to be still and remained with his ear bent down to the lower opening of the funnel.

"Listen, my lady," said the cardinal. "The business is important. Sit down, and let us talk about it."

"My Lady!" muttered Athos.

"I am listening to your eminence with the greatest attention," replied a voice, which made him start.

"A small vessel, with an English crew, whose captain is devoted to me, awaits you at the mouth of the Charente, at the Fort de la Pointe ; it will sail to-morrow morning."

"I must set out to-night then ?"

"Directly ; that is to say, as soon as you have received my instructions. Two men, whom you will find at the door when you go out, will escort you. You will let me go first, and then, half an hour after, you will depart yourself."

"Yes, my lord. Now, let us return to the commission with which you are pleased to charge me ; and, as I am anxious to continue to deserve your confidence, begin to explain it, in clear and precise terms, so that I may not make any mistake."

There was a moment of profound silence between the two interlocutors. It was evident that the cardinal was weighing the expressions he was about to use, and that the lady was collecting all her intellectual faculties to understand what he was going to say, and to engrave it on her memory, when it was said.

Athos took advantage of this moment to tell his two companions to fasten the door inside, and to beckon them to come and listen with him. The two musketeers, who loved their ease, brought a chair for each of themselves and one for Athos. They all three seated themselves, with their heads close together, and their ears wide open.

"You are going to London," resumed the cardinal ; "on your arriving there you will seek out Buckingham."

"I would observe to your eminence," said her ladyship, "that since the affair of the diamond studs, in which the duke has always suspected me, his grace mistrusts me more than ever."

"But you have no occasion this time," said the cardinal, "to gain his confidence ; you are to present yourself frankly and loyally, as a negotiatress."

"Frankly and loyally!" repeated the lady, with an indescribable expression of duplicity.

"Yes, frankly and loyally," replied the cardinal, in the same tone, "all this business must be transacted openly."

"I will follow your eminence's instructions to the very letter, and I wait for you to give them."

"You will go to Buckingham from *me*, and you will tell him that I am aware of all the preparations he is making, but that I do not much disquiet myself about them, seeing that, at the very first step he ventures on, I will ruin the queen."

"Will he believe that your eminence is in a condition to execute your threats?"

"Yes, for I am in possession of proofs."

"It will be necessary for me to be able to submit these proofs for his examination."

"Certainly; you will say to him, first, that I will publish the report of Bois-Robert, and of the Marquis de Beautru, concerning the interview which the duke had with the queen, on the evening that the constable's lady gave a masked ball; and you will add—in order to leave him no room for doubt—that he came in the costume of the Great Mogul, which was to have been worn by the Duke of Guise, and which he bought of this latter for the sum of three thousand pistoles."

"Good, my lord!"

"All the details of his entry in the Louvre, where he introduced himself in the character of an Italian fortuneteller, and of his leaving in the middle of the night, are known to me; and you will tell him, in order that he may again be assured of the accuracy of my information, that he had under his cloak a large white robe, thickly covered with tears and deaths' heads, and cross-bones, in which, in case of surprise, he was to personate the

phantom of the White Lady, who, as is well known, revisits the Louvre whenever any great event is about to be accomplished."

"Is that all, my lord?"

"Tell him that I know all particulars of the adventure at Amiens, and that I shall make a little wittily turned romance of it, with a plan of the garden, and the portraits of the principal actors in that nocturnal scene."

"I will tell him this."

"Tell him, also, that I have Montague in the Bastile; it is true we found no letter on him, but the torture may make him tell all he knows—and even a little more."

"Admirable!"

"And, lastly, add, that his grace, in his hurry to leave the Isle of Ré, forgot to put in his pocket a certain letter of Madame de Chevreuse, which strangely compromises the queen, inasmuch as it proves, not only that her majesty is capable of loving the enemies of the king, but, also, that she is actually conspiring with the enemies of France. You now thoroughly comprehend all that I have told you, do you not?"

"Your eminence shall judge—the high constable's lady's ball, the night at Louvre, the evening at Amiens, the arrest of Montague, and the letter of Madame de Chevreuse."

"That is right, my lady; that is right; you have an excellent memory."

"But," resumed she to whom the cardinal had just addressed this compliment, "if, in spite of all these reasons, the duke should not yield, and should continue to menace France?"

"The duke is in love like a madman, or rather like an idiot," replied Richelieu, with intense bitterness. "Like the Paladins of old, he has only undertaken this war to obtain a glance from his mistress's eyes. If he knows

that the war will cost the lady of his love her honor and perhaps her liberty, I promise you that he will look twice before he gives his answer."

"But," said the lady, with a perseverance which proved that she was determined to understand all that was included in the mission she was about to undertake; "but still, if he *should* persist?"

"If he persists?" said the cardinal; "but it is not probable."

"It is possible," rejoined the lady.

"If he persists——" His eminence paused, and then continued: "if he persists—well, I must put my hope in one of those events which change the fortunes of States."

"If your eminence would cite to me some of those historical events," said her ladyship, "I might possibly participate in your confidence concerning the future."

"Well, look, for example," said Richelieu; "when, for a cause very similar to that which now actuates the duke, his Majesty Henry IV., of glorious memory, went, in 1610, to invade at the same time both Flanders and Italy, in order that he might assail Austria on both sides—did not an event occur which saved Austria? Is not the King of France entitled to the same good fortune as the emperor?"

"Your eminence alludes to the assassin's knife in the Rue de la Feronnier?"

"Exactly so," said the cardinal.

"Is your eminence not afraid that the fate of Ravailiac would deter those who might be for an instant tempted to imitate his example?"

"In all times, and all countries, especially in those countries which are divided in religious faith, there are always religious fanatics who would be well contented to be looked upon as martyrs. And here, at this very moment, it occurs to me that the Puritans are furious

against the Duke of Buckingham, and that their preachers speak of him as the Anti-Christ."

"Well?" inquired her ladyship.

"Well," continued the cardinal, in a careless tone, "it would be only necessary, for instance, to find some young, beautiful and clever woman, who wanted to take revenge upon the duke. Such a woman may be found. The duke has been a favored lover; and, if he has sown much affection by his promises of deathless constancy, he has also sown much hatred by his eternal infidelities."

"Unquestionably," remarked her ladyship, coldly, "such a woman may be found."

"Well, such a woman would, by putting the knife of Clement or of Ravaillac into the hands of an assassin, save France."

"Yes, but she would be an accomplice in assassination."

"Have the accomplices of Ravaillac, or of Jacques Clement, ever been discovered?"

"No; for they stood perhaps too high in the world for any one to dare to seek them where they really were. It is not for everybody, my lord, that a Palace of Justice would be burnt down."

"What, do you not believe, then, that the burning of the palace was an accident?" asked Richelieu, in the very tone with which he would have asked the most unimportant question.

"I, my lord," replied her ladyship, "I have no belief about it. I cite a fact—nothing more. Only, I would say, that if I were called Mademoiselle de Montpensier, or the Queen Marie de Medicis, I should take fewer precautions than I do as simple Lady de Winter."

"That is strictly logical," said Richelieu; "what is it, then, you require?"

"I require an order, ratifying beforehand, whatever I may think it necessary to do for the prosperity of France."

"But we must first find the woman I alluded to who craves revenge upon the duke."

"She is found," said the lady.

"Then we must find the wretched fanatic who will serve as the instrument of God's judgment."

"He shall be found!"

"Well," said the cardinal, "it will then be time enough to solicit the order that you have just asked for."

"Your eminence is right," resumed her ladyship, "and I was to blame for seeing, in the mission with which you honor me, anything beyond what it in truth embraces: that is—to announce to his grace, in your eminence's name, that you are aware of the different disguises under which he contrived to approach the queen at the entertainment given by the constable's lady; that you have proofs of the interview which the queen granted at the Louvre to a certain Italian astrologer, who was no other than the Duke of Buckingham; that you have given directions for a witty little romance to be written concerning the adventure at Amiens, with a plan of the garden in which it was enacted, and portraits of the actors who took part in it; that Montague is in the Bastile, and that the torture will make him tell all that he remembers, and even much that he does not remember: and, finally, that you possess a certain letter from Madame de Chevreuse, which was found in His grace's quarters, and which strangely compromises, not only the lady that wrote it, but also her in whose name it was written. But, if he persists in spite of these representations, as this is the limit of my commission, it will only remain for me to pray to God to perform a miracle for the salvation of France. This is my precise charge, is it not, my lord; and I have nothing further to perform?"

"Exactly so," said Richelieu, coldly.

"And now," continued her ladyship, without appearing to observe the altered manner of the cardinal toward her; "since I have received your eminence's instructions with regard to your enemies, will your lordship permit me to say a few words concerning my own?"

"You have enemies, then?" said Richelieu.

"Yes, my lord, enemies against whom you are bound to support me, since I made them in serving your eminence."

"And who are they?" demanded the cardinal.

"There is, first, a little busy-body, of the name of Bonancieux."

"She is in prison at Nantes."

"That is to say, she *was* there," replied the lady; "but the queen has managed to extract an order from the king by the assistance of which she has been removed to a convent."

"To a convent?" said the cardinal.

"Yes; a convent."

"And *what* convent?"

* "I do not know; the secret has been well kept."

"I will find out, though!"

"And your eminence will surely let me know in what convent this woman is?"

"I have no objection," replied the cardinal.

"Very well. Now I have another enemy, whom I fear far more than this little Madame Bonancieux."

"Who is that?"

"Her lover."

"What is his name?"

"Oh! your eminence knows him well," exclaimed the lady, carried away by her anger: "it is the evil genius of both of us: it is he who, in an encounter with your eminence's guards, decided the victory in favor of the

king's musketeers ; it is he who gave three sword wounds to De Wardes, your eminence's emissary, and who rendered the promising affair of the diamond studs abortive : and, lastly, it is he who, knowing that it was I who had deprived him of Madame Bonancieux, has sworn my death."

"Ah, ah!" said the cardinal, "I know who you mean."

"Yes, I mean that wretch, D'Artagnan."

"He is a bold fellow," said the cardinal.

"And it is exactly because he is a bold fellow, that he is the more to be feared."

"We ought first," said the cardinal, "to have some proof of his connection with the duke."

"A proof!" exclaimed the lady : "I will have a dozen."

"Well, then, let me have that proof, and it is the simplest thing in the world; I will clap him in the Bastile."

"Very well, my lord ; and afterwards?"

"When a man is in the Bastile there is no *afterwards*," said the cardinal, in a hollow voice. "Ah, egad!" continued he, "if it was as easy for me to get rid of my enemy as it is to rid you of yours, and if it was against such people as these that you craved impunity—"

"My lord," said the lady, "boon for boon, life for life, man for man: give me the one and I will give you the other."

"I do not understand what you mean," replied the cardinal, "nor do I wish to do so: but I shall be glad to oblige you, and I see no objection to giving you the order you demand, as to such an insignificant creature as this; and the more willingly, as you tell me that this little D'Artagnan is a libertine, a duelist, and a traitor."

"A wretch, my lord—a wretch!"

"Then give me a pen, ink and paper," said the cardinal.

"Here they are, my lord."

"Very well."

There was a moment's silence, which proved that the cardinal was occupied in thinking of the words in which the order should be written, or perhaps, in writing it. Athos, who had not lost one syllable of the conversation, took a hand of each of his companions, and led them for safety to the other end of the room.

"Well," said Porthos, "what do you want, and why do you not let us hear the end of the conversation?"

"Hush!" said Athos in a whisper; "we have heard all that it was necessary for us to hear; besides, I do not hinder you from listening to the rest, but I must go."

"You must go," said Porthos: "but if the cardinal should ask for you, what are we to say?"

"You will not wait for him to ask. You will tell him beforehand, that I am gone forward to clear the way, since, from certain words of our landlord's, I have been led to suppose that the road is not quite safe. I will drop a word or two to the cardinal's equerry. The rest concerns myself—do not be uneasy about it."

"Be prudent, Athos," said Aramis.

"Make yourself easy," replied Athos: "you know that I am cool enough."

Porthos and Aramis returned again to their places near the funnel. As for Athos, he went out without any disguise, took his horse, which was fastened with those of his two friends to the shutter, convinced the equerry in four words of the necessity of an advance guard for their safe conduct home, looked with unusual care to the priming of his pistols, put his sword between his teeth, and set off as a forlorn hope, on the road that led toward the camp.

CHAPTER XLV.

A CONJUGAL SCENE.

As Athos had foreseen, it was not long before the cardinal came down. He opened the door of the room in which he had left the three musketeers, and found Porthos and Aramis engaged in a most earnest game of dice. With a rapid glance he examined every corner of the room, and saw that one of the guards was missing.

“What has become of M. Athos?” he asked.

“My lord,” replied Porthos, “he is gone forward on the look-out, as some remarks of our landlord’s led him to suspect that the road was not safe.”

“And what have you been doing, M. Porthos?”

“I have won five pistoles from Aramis.”

“And can you now return with me?”

“We are at your eminence’s command.”

“To horse, then, gentlemen, for it is getting late.”

The equerry was at the door, holding the cardinal’s horse. At a little distance two men and three horses were visible in the night; these were the individuals who were to conduct My Lady to the Fort de la Pointe, and to superintend her embarkation.

The equerry confirmed what the two musketeers had already told the cardinal concerning Athos. Richelieu gave a sign of approbation, and resumed his journey, taking the same precautions in returning as he had done in his advance.

Let us leave him on his way to the camp, protected

by the equerry and the two musketeers, and return to Athos.

For a hundred yards he preserved the same pace. But, once out of sight, he pushed his horse to the right, made a small circuit, and returned to within twenty paces, where, concealed in a coppice, he awaited the passage of the little troop. Having recognized the laced hats of his companions, and the gold fringe of the cardinal's cloak, he tarried till the party had turned the corner of the road, and having lost sight of them, he galloped up to the tavern, and was admitted without any difficulty.

The landlord knew him again.

"My commanding officer," said Athos, "has forgotten a communication of importance he should have made to the lady on the first floor, and has sent me to repair his forgetfulness."

"Go up," said the landlord. "The lady is still in her chamber."

Athos availed himself of this permission, and ascended the stairs with his lightest step; and when he had reached the landing-place, he perceived, through the half-open door, the lady, who was tying on her hat.

He entered the room, and closed the door behind him.

Enveloped in his cloak, and with his hat drawn down upon his eyes, Athos stood upright before the door.

On seeing this mysterious figure, mute and motionless as a statue, the lady was greatly alarmed.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" exclaimed she.

"Yes! it is indeed she," muttered Athos.

Letting his cloak fall and lifting up his hat, he advanced toward her ladyship.

"Do you recognize me, madame?" said he.

The lady took one step forward, and then recoiled as though Athos had been an adder.

"Come," said Athos, "I can see that you recognize me."

"The Count de la Fère!" muttered her ladyship, growing deadly pale, and drawing back till the wall impeded her retreat.

"Yes, my lady," replied Athos, "the Count de la Fère in person, who returns expressly from the other world to have the pleasure of seeing you. Let us sit down then, and converse, as the cardinal said."

Impelled by unutterable terror, her ladyship sat down, without uttering a word.

"You are a demon let loose upon the earth," said Athos. "Your power is great, I know; but you know, also, that, with God's assistance, men have often overcome most terrible fiends. You have once before crossed my path. I thought I had crushed you, madame, but either I deceived myself, or hell has given you new life."

At these words, which recalled fearful memories, the lady held down her head, and groaned.

"Yes, hell has given you new life," resumed Athos; "has made you rich, has given you another name, has almost endowed you with another face; but it has not expunged either the brand upon your body or the stains upon your soul."

The lady arose, as if operated by a spring, and her eyes darted lightning. Athos remained seated.

"You thought me dead, did you?" he continued, "as I thought you dead; and the name of Athos has concealed the Count de la Fère, even as the name of Lady de Winter has concealed Anne de Breuil. Was it not thus we were called, when your honored brother married us? Our position is truly strange," continued Athos, laughing, "we have both of us only lived till now, because each thought the other dead; and remembrance is less burdensome than a reality—although a remembrance, even, is sometimes a voracious thing!"

"But, after all," said the lady, in a hollow voice, "what brings you here to me, and what do you want with me?"

"I want to tell you, that, although I have been invisible to you, I have not lost sight of you."

"You know what I have done?"

"I can recite your actions, day by day, from your entrance into the cardinal's service, until this present night."

A smile of incredulity passed across the ashy lips of My Lady.

"Listen. It is you who cut the two diamond studs from Buckingham's shoulder; it is you who abducted Madame Bonancieux; it is you who, enamored of De Wardes, and thinking to receive him, opened your door to M. d'Artagnan; it is you who, believing that De Wardes deceived you, wished to have him slain by his rival; it is you who, when this rival had discovered your disgraceful secret, sought to have him assassinated in his turn, by two murderers, whom you sent to dog him; it is you who, when you found bullets fail, sent poisoned wine, with a forged letter, to make your victim fancy that it was the present of his friends; and, lastly, it is you who—here in this very room, seated on the very chair where I now sit—have this moment made an engagement with Cardinal Richelieu to get the Duke of Buckingham assassinated, in exchange for his undertaking to allow you to assassinate M. d'Artagnan."

Her ladyship was livid.

"You must indeed be Satan!" said she.

"Perhaps so," replied Athos: "but, at all events, mark this well: assassinate the Duke of Buckingham, or cause him to be assassinated—it is of no consequence to me; I know him not; and he is, besides, the enemy of France. But, touch not one single hair of the head of D'Artagnan, who is my faithful friend, whom I love and

will protect; or I swear to you, by my father's head, that the crime which you have then committed, or attempted to commit, shall be indeed your last."

"M. d'Artagnan has cruelly insulted me," said she, "and he must die."

"Indeed! And is it possible that *you* can be insulted, madame?" said Athos, with an inexpressibly scornful laugh. "He has insulted *you* and he must die!"

"He shall die!" repeated her ladyship: "she first; and he afterward."

Athos felt his brain begin to reel. The sight of this creature, who had nothing of the woman in her nature, recalled most fearful recollections. He thought that one day, in a situation less perilous than that in which he now stood, he had already sought to sacrifice her to his honor. His murderous desire came burning back upon him like an invading fever. He rose, in his turn, and put his hand to his belt, from which he drew a pistol, which he cocked.

The lady, pale as a corpse, endeavored to cry out. Her frozen tongue could only utter a hoarse sound, which had no resemblance to the human voice, but seemed rather the growl of some savage beast. Glued as it were against the gloomy tapestry, with her disheveled hair, she looked like the appalling image of Terror.

Athos slowly raised the pistol, stretched forth his arm until the weapon almost touched the lady's forehead, and then, in a voice the more terrible, as it had all the intense calmness of an inflexible resolution:

"Madame," said he, "you must immediately give me the paper which the cardinal wrote just now, or, on my soul, I will blow out your brains."

With any other man the lady might have had some doubt; but she *knew* Athos. Nevertheless, she remained motionless.

" You have one second to decide in," continued he.

The lady saw, from the contraction of his brow, that the shot was coming: she hastily put her hands to her bosom, and drew forth a paper, which she handed to Athos.

" Take it," said she, " and may you be forevermore accursed."

Athos took the paper, replaced the pistol in his belt, went to the lamp to assure himself that he had the right one, unfolded it, and read,

" It is by my order, and for the good of the state, that the bearer of this did that which he has now done.

" RICHELIEU."

" And now," said Athos, resuming his cloak, and replacing his hat upon his head, " and now that I have drawn your teeth, bite if you can!"

He left the lady without even looking once behind him.

At the door he found the two men with the horse which they were leading.

" Gentlemen," said he, " his lordship's orders are, as you know, to conduct this lady, without loss of time, to the Fort de la Pointe, and not to leave her until she is on board."

As these words exactly accorded with the order which they had received, they bowed their heads in token of assent.

As for Athos, he sprang lightly into his saddle, and went off at a gallop. Only, instead of keeping to the road, he went across the country, pushing his horse on very fast, and halting from time to time to listen.

In one of these halts, he heard the sound of several horses on the road. He did not doubt that it was the cardinal and his escort. Taking immediately another direction forward, and then rubbing his horse down with

some broom and dry leaves, he placed himself in the middle of the road, at no more than two hundred paces from the camp.

"Who goes there?" cried he, when he heard the horsemen.

"It is our brave musketeer, I believe," said the cardinal.

"Yes, my lord," replied Athos, "it is himself."

"M. Athos," said Richelieu, "accept my best thanks for the care that you have taken. Gentlemen, we have reached our destination. Take the gate to the left hand; the word for the night is—'Roi et Rô.'"

As he said this, the cardinal bowed to the three friends, and turned to the right, followed by his equerry: for, that night, he slept in the camp.

"Well," said Porthos and Aramis, as soon as the cardinal was out of hearing, "well, he signed the paper that she asked for."

"I know it," said Athos quietly, "for here it is."

The three friends did not exchange another word before they reached their quarters, excepting to give the word to the sentinels on guard.

But they sent Musqueton to tell Planchet that his master was requested, on leaving the trenches, to come immediately to the musketeers' quarters.

On the other hand, as Athos had foreseen, My Lady, on finding the two men at the door, followed them without hesitation. She had, for an instant, an idea of seeking another interview with the cardinal, and relating to him what had passed; but a revelation on her part would produce one from Athos. She might say, indeed, that Athos had hanged her; but he would state that she was branded. So she thought it better to be silent, to depart discreetly, to accomplish with her accustomed ability the difficult commission which had been intrusted to her,

and then, when these things were ended to the cardinal's satisfaction, to return and claim her revenge.

Consequently, having traveled all night, she was at Fort la Pointe by seven in the morning; at eight she was aboard, and at nine the vessel weighed anchor, and made sail for England.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE BASTION OF ST. GERVAIS.

ON arriving at his friends' quarters, D'Artagnan found them assembled in the same room. Athos was thinking; Porthos was twisting his mustache; and Aramis was reading his prayers in a charming little book, bound in blue velvet.

"By my soul, gentlemen," said he, "I hope that what you have to tell me is worth the trouble, otherwise I should not forgive your depriving me of rest after a night passed in dismantling a bastion, entirely by myself. Ah! why were you not there, gentlemen? It was hot work!"

"We were in another place, where it was by no means cold either," said Porthos, giving his mustache a turn peculiar to himself.

"Hush!" said Athos.

"Oh, oh!" said D'Artagnan, understanding the slight frown of the musketeer, "it seems that there is something new stirring."

"Aramis," said Athos, "you breakfasted at the Par-paillet tavern the day before yesterday, I believe."

"Yes."

"How are things there?"

"Why, I fared but poorly myself; it was a fast-day, and they had only eggs."

"What," said Athos, "in a seaport, and no fish?"

"They say that the dyke which the cardinal is digging

drives the fish out into the open sea," said Aramis, resuming his pious reading.

"But that is not what I wanted to know, Aramis," continued Athos. "Were you free, and did no one disturb you?"

"Why, I think that there were not many idlers," replied Aramis. "Yes, in fact, for what you want, Athos, I think we shall do well enough at the Parpaillot."

"Come, then, let us to the Parpaillot," said Athos, "for here the walls are like sheets of paper."

D'Artagnan, who was accustomed to his friend's manner, and understood by a word, a gesture, or a look from him, that circumstances called for seriousness, took his arm and went out with him, without uttering a word. Porthos followed them, in conversation with Aramis.

On their way they met Grimaud, and Athos beckoned him to attend them. Grimaud, according to custom, obeyed in silence. The poor fellow had finished by almost forgetting how to speak.

When they arrived at the Parpaillot, it was seven in the morning, and the day was just beginning to dawn. The three friends ordered a good breakfast, and entered a room where the landlord assured them that they would not be disturbed.

The hour was, unfortunately, ill-chosen for a consultation. The morning drum had just been beaten; every one was busy shaking off the sleepiness of night, and to drive away the dampness of the morning air, came to take a little dram at the tavern. Dragoons, Swiss guards, musketeers, and light cavalry, succeeded one another with a rapidity very beneficial to the business of mine host, but very unfavorable to the designs of our four friends, who replied but sullenly to the salutations, toasts, and jests of their companions.

"Come," said Athos, "we shall invite some rousing

quarrel on our hands presently, and we do not want that just now. D'Artagnan, tell us about your night's work: we will tell you ours afterward."

"In fact," said one of the light-cavalry, who, whilst rocking himself, held in his hand a glass of brandy, which he slowly sipped, "in fact, you were in the trenches, you gentlemen of the guards, and it seems to me that you had a squabble with the Rochellais."

D'Artagnan looked at Athos, to see whether he ought to answer this intruder who thrust himself into the conversation.

"Well," said Athos, "did you hear M. de Busigny, who did you the honor to address you? Tell us what took place in the night, since these gentlemen desire it."

"Did you not take a bastion?" asked a Swiss, who was drinking rum and beer mixed.

"Yes, sir," replied D'Artagnan, bowing, "we had that honor. And also, as you have heard, we introduced a barrel of powder under one of the angles, which on exploding, made a very pretty breach, without reckoning that, as the bastion is very old, all the rest of the building is much shaken."

"And what bastion is it?" asked a dragoon who held, spitted on his saber, a goose which he had brought to be cooked.

"The bastion Saint Gervais," replied D'Artagnan, "from behind which the Rochellais annoyed our workmen."

"And was it warm work?"

"Yes. We lost five men and the Rochellais some eight or ten."

"Balzampleu!" said the Swiss, who, in spite of the admirable collection of oaths which the German language possesses, had got a habit of swearing in French.

"But it is probable," said the light-horseman, "that

they will send pioneers to repair the bastion this morning."

"Yes, it is probable," said D'Artagnan.

"Gentlemen," said Athos, "a wager!"

"Ah! a wager," said the Swiss.

"What is it?" asked the light-horseman.

"Stop," said the dragoon, laying his saber like a spiton the two great iron dogs which kept up the fire in the chimney, "I am busy. A dripping-pan here, you noodle of a landlord, that I may not lose one drop of the fat of this celestial bird."

"He is right," said the Swiss, "the juice of a goose is very good with puddings"

"There!" said the dragoon; "and now for the wager. We are listening, M. Athos."

"Well, M. de Busigny," said Athos, "I bet you that my three comrades, Messieurs Porthos, Aramis, and D'Artagnan, and myself, will go ana breakfast in the bastion of St. Gervais, and that we will stay there for one hour by the clock, whatever the enemy may do to dislodge us."

Porthos and Aramis looked at each other, for they began to understand.

"Why," said D'Artagnan, stooping to Athos's ear, "you are going to get us all killed without mercy."

"We shall be more certainly killed if we do not go," replied Athos.

"Ah, faith, gentlemen," said Porthos, throwing himself back in his chair, and twisting his mustache, "that is a fine wager, I hope."

"And I accept it," said M. de Busigny. "Now we must fix the stakes."

"You are four, gentlemen," said Athos, "and we are four: a dinner for eight—will that suit you?"

"Just the thing!" replied M. de Busigny.

"The very thing!" added the dragoon.

"That will do!" exclaimed the Swiss. The fourth auditor, who had remained silent throughout the conversation, bowed his head, as a sign that he acquiesced in the proposition.

"The *déjeuner* of these gentlemen is ready," said the landlord.

"Well, then, bring it here," said Athos.

The landlord obeyed. Athos called Grimaud, showed him a large basket, which was lying in a corner, and made him a sign to wrap up in the napkins all the eatables that had been brought.

Grimaud, comprehending at once that they were going to breakfast on the grass, took the basket packed up the eatables, put in the bottles, and took the basket up in his arms.

"But where are you going to eat this breakfast?" said the landlord.

"What does it signify to you," replied Athos, "provided you are paid for it?" And he threw two pistoles majestically on the table.

"Shall I get you change, sir?" said mine host.

"No; but add a couple of bottles of champagne, and the difference will pay for the napkins."

The landlord had not made quite such a good thing of it as he at first expected; but he recompensed himself for it by palming off, on his four guests, two bottles of Anjou wine, instead of the two bottles of champagne.

"M. de Busigny, will you regulate your watch by mine, or permit me to regulate mine by yours?" inquired Athos.

"Whichever you please," said the light-dragoon, drawing from his fob a very beautiful watch encircled with diamonds. "Half-past seven," added he.

"Five-and-thirty minutes after seven," said Athos, "we

shall remember that I am five minutes in advance, sir."

Then bowing to the astonished waiters, the four young men took the road toward the bastion of St. Gervais, followed by Grimaud, who carried the basket, not knowing where he was going, and, from the passive obedience that was habitual to him, not thinking even of inquiring.

Whilst they were within the precincts of the camp, the four friends did not exchange a word; they were, besides, followed by the curious, who, having heard of the wager, wished to know how they would extricate themselves from the affair. But when once they had got beyond the lines of fortification, and found themselves in the open country, D'Artagnan, who was entirely ignorant of what they were about, thought it high time to demand some explanation.

"And now, my dear Athos," said he, "have the kindness to tell me where you are going."

"You can see well enough," replied Athos, "we are going to the bastion."

"But what are we going to do there?"

"You know very well—we are going to breakfast there."

"But why do we not breakfast at the Parpaillet?"

"Because we have most important things to tell you, and it was impossible to converse for five minutes in that tavern with all those troublesome fellows, who come and go, and continually address us. Here, at least," continued Athos, pointing to the bastion, "no one will come to interrupt us."

"It appears to me," said D'Artagnan, with that prudence which was so intimately and so naturally connected with his superb courage—"it appears to me, that we could have found some retired spot, somewhere in the sand-hills, on the sea-shore."

"Where we should have been seen all four in council together, so that, in a quarter of an hour, the cardinal

would have been informed by his spies that we were holding a consultation."

"Yes," said Aramis. "Athos is right; *animadvertisetur in desertis.*"

"A desert would not have been a bad place," remarked Porthos; "but the difficulty is to find it."

"There is no desert where a bird could not pass over one's head or a fish jump from the water, or a rabbit run from her seat; and I believe that bird, fish and rabbit, one and all, have become the cardinal's spies. It is much better, therefore, to pursue our enterprise. Besides we cannot now recede without disgrace. We have made a bet—a bet which could not have been foreseen, and of which I defy any one to guess the true cause. To win it, we must remain an hour in the bastion. Either we shall or shall not, be attacked. If we are not, we shall have time to talk, and no one will hear us: for I will answer for it that the walls of that bastion have no ears. If we are attacked, we will talk just the same, and shall, moreover, by defending ourselves, be covered with glory. So you see that everything is favorable to us."

"Yes," said D'Artagnan, "but we shall inevitably be shot."

"Yes," rejoined Athos, "but you know very well that the bullets most to be feared are not those of the enemy."

"Yet it seems to me," said Porthos, "that for such an expedition we should at least have brought our muskets."

"You are a simpleton, friend Porthos, why should we encumber ourselves with a useless burden?"

"I do not find a good regulation musket, with a dozen cartridges and a powder-flask, useless in front of an enemy."

"Well," rejoined Athos, "did you not hear what D'Artagnan said?"

"And what did D'Artagnan say?" asked Porthos.

“D’Artagnan says that in last night’s attack as many as eight or ten French were killed, and as many of the enemy.”

“Well?”

“There has not been time to strip them, has there, seeing there was something more urgent to attend to?”

“Well?”

“Well, we shall find their muskets, powder-flasks, and cartridges, and, instead of four muskets and a dozen balls, we shall have about fifteen muskets and a hundred rounds of ammunition to fire.”

“Oh, Athos!” said Aramis, “you are indeed a great man!”

Porthos bowed his head in token of acquiescence.

D’Artagnan alone did not appear quite convinced.

Grimaud unquestionably partook of the young man’s incredulity; for, seeing that they continued to march toward the bastion, of which he had before had some suspicion, he plucked his master by the skirt of his coat.

“Where are you going?” he inquired by a sign.

Athos pointed to the bastion.

“But,” said the silent Grimaud still in the same dialect, “we shall leave our skins there.”

Athos raised his eyes and his hands to heaven.

* Grimaud set down his basket on the ground, and seated himself upon it, shaking his head.

Athos took a pistol from his belt, looked at the priming, cocked it, and leveled it at Grimaud’s ear.

Grimaud found himself lifted up and on his legs, as if by magic.

Athos then beckoned to him to take up the basket, and to march in front.

Grimaud obeyed; so that all the poor fellow had gained by this momentary pantomime, was, that he had been transformed from the rear guard to the van.

Having reached the bastion, the four friends looked behind them. More than three hundred soldiers, of every kind, had assembled at the entrance of the camp; and, in a separate group, they saw M. de Busigny, the dragoon, the Swiss, and the fourth wagerer.

Athos took off his hat, raised it on the end of his sword, and waved it in the air.

All the spectators returned his salutation, accompanying this act of politeness with a loud hurrah, which reached their ears.

After this occurrence they all four disappeared in the bastion, where Grimaud had already preceded them.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE COUNCIL OF THE MUSKETEERS.

As Athos had foreseen, the bastion was tenanted alone by about a dozen dead—French and Rochellais.

“Gentlemen,” said Athos, who had taken command of the expedition, “whilst Grimaud sets the table, let us begin by collecting muskets and ammunition. We can, moreover, converse whilst we are doing it. These gentlemen,” added he, pointing to the dead bodies, “do not hear us.”

“But we may, nevertheless, throw them into the ditches,” said Porthos, “having first satisfied ourselves that they have nothing in their pockets.”

“Yes,” replied Athos, “but that is Grimaud’s business.”

“Well, then,” said D’Artagnan, “let Grimaud search them, and throw them over the walls.”

“Not upon any account,” said Athos. “They may be of the utmost use to us.”

“These dead of use to us!” exclaimed Porthos. “Ah, nonsense! you are surely going crazy, my dear friend.”

“Do not judge rashly, advise both gospel and cardinal,” replied Athos. “How many muskets are there, gentlemen?”

“Twelve.”

“How much ammunition?”

“A hundred rounds.”

“It is quite as many as we shall need: let us load our muskets.”

The four companions set themselves to work: and just as they had loaded the last gun, Grimaud made a sign to them that breakfast was ready.

Athos indicated by a gesture that he was contented with what was done, and then pointed out to Grimaud a sort of sheltered box, where he was to place himself as sentinel. But, to mitigate the annoyance of his guard, Athos allowed him to take with him a loaf, a couple of cutlets, and a bottle of wine.

“And now, to breakfast!” said Athos.

The four friends seated themselves on the ground, with their legs crossed, like Turks or tailors.

“And now,” said D’Artagnan, “as you are no longer afraid of being heard, I hope you are going to let us have the secret.”

“I hope I am providing you at the same time with both amusement and glory, gentlemen!” said Athos. “I have induced you to take a charming little excursion: here is an admirable breakfast; and away over yonder, are five hundred persons, as you may perceive through the embrasures, who take us for madmen or heroes—two classes of fools that very much resemble each other.”

“But this secret?”

“I saw My Lady last night,” said Athos.

D’Artagnan was carrying his glass to his lips; but at the sound of her ladyship’s name, his hand trembled so that he placed his glass on the ground, in order that he might not spill its contents.

“You have seen your wi——”

“Hush, then!” interrupted Athos; “you forget, my dear fellow, that these gentlemen are not, like you, initiated in my family affairs. I have seen her ladyship.”

“And where happened that?” demanded D’Artagnan.

“About two leagues from hence, at the Red Dove.”

“In that case, I am a lost man,” said D’Artagnan.

“Not just yet,” replied Athos; “for, by this time, she must have quitted the shores of France.”

D’Artagnan breathed again.

“But, after all,” inquired Porthos, “who is this lady?”

“A charming woman!” said Athos, tasting a glass of sparkling wine. “Scamp of a landlord!” exclaimed he, “who gives us Anjou for champagne, and who thinks we shall be deceived by the substitution! Yes!” continued he, “a charming woman, to whom our friend D’Artagnan has done something unpardonable, for which she is seeking every human means to avenge herself—a month ago, by trying to get him shot; a week ago, by sending him poison; and yesterday, by demanding his head of the cardinal.”

“What! demanding my head of the cardinal?” cried D’Artagnan, pale with terror.

“Yes,” said Porthos, “it is as true as gospel; for I heard her with my own ears.”

“And I also,” said Aramis.

“Then,” said D’Artagnan, letting his arm fall in a desponding manner, “it is useless to struggle longer: I may as well blow out my brains at once, and have done with it.”

“That is the *last* folly a man should perpetrate,” said Athos, “seeing it is the only one which will admit of no remedy.”

“But with such enemies I shall never escape,” said D’Artagnan. “First, my unknown antagonist of Meung; then, De Wardes, on whom I inflicted four wounds; next, this lady whose secret I found out; and, lastly, the cardinal, whose vengeance I intercepted.”

“Well!” said Athos, “and all this makes only four, and we are four—one against one. Egad! if we may

trust to Grimaud's signs, we are now about to engage with a far greater number of foes. What's the matter, Grimaud? Considering the seriousness of the circumstance, I permit you to speak, my friend; but be laconic, I beseech you. What do you see?"

"A troop.

"How many persons?"

"Twenty men."

"What sort of men?"

"Sixteen sappers and four dragoons."

"How far are they off?"

"Five hundred paces."

"Good! We have still time to finish our fowl, and to drink a glass of wine. To your health, D'Artagnan!"

"Your health!" repeated Aramis and Porthos.

"Well, then, to my health; although I do not imagine that your good wishes will be of much benefit to me."

"Bah!" said Athos. "God is great, as the Mohammedans say, and the future is in His hands."

Then, having swallowed his wine and put the glass down, Athos carelessly arose, took the first musket that came to hand, and strolled toward an embrasure.

The three others did the same. As for Grimaud, he had orders to place himself behind them and to reload their muskets.

An instant afterward they saw the troop appearing. It came along a kind of branch trench, which formed a communication between the bastion and the town.

"Zounds!" said Athos, "it is scarcely worth while to disturb ourselves for a score of fellows armed with pick-axes, mattocks, and spades! Grimaud ought to have quietly beckoned to them to go about their business, and I am quite convinced that they would have left us to ourselves."

"I must doubt it," said D'Artagnan, "for they come

forward with great resolution. Besides, in addition to the workmen, there are four soldiers, and a brigadier, armed with muskets."

"That is because they have not seen us," replied Athos.

"Faith," said Aramis, "I confess that I am reluctant to fire upon these poor devils of citizens."

"He is a bad priest," said Porthos, "who pities heretics."

"Upon my word," said Athos, "Aramis is right. I will give them a preliminary talking to."

"What the plague are you doing?" cried D'Artagnan; "you will get yourself shot, my dear fellow."

But Athos paid no attention to this warning, and mounting on the breach, his fusee in one hand and his hat in the other :

"Gentlemen," said he, bowing courteously, and addressing himself to the soldiers and pioneers who, astonished by this apparition, halted at about fifty paces from the bastion; "gentlemen, we are, some of my friends and myself, engaged at breakfast in the bastion. Now you know that nothing is more disagreeable than to be disturbed at breakfast; so we entreat you, if you really have business here, to wait till we have finished our repast, or to come back in a little while: unless, indeed, you experience the salutary desire of forsaking the ranks of rebellion, and coming to drink with us to the health of the king of France."

"Take care, Athos," said D'Artagnan; "don't you see that they are taking aim at you."

"Yes, yes," said Athos; "but these are citizens, who are shocking bad marksmen, and will take particular care to shoot wide of the mark."

In fact, at that moment four shots were fired, and the bullets whistled around Athos, but without one touching him.

Four shots were instantaneously returned, but with a far better aim than that of the aggressors; three soldiers fell dead, and one of the pioneers was wounded.

"Grimaud," said Athos, from the breach, "another musket."

Grimaud obeyed instantly.

The three friends had also reloaded their arms. A second discharge soon followed the first, and the brigadier and two pioneers fell dead. The rest of the troop took to flight.

"Come, gentlemen, a sortie!" said Athos.

The four friends rushed out of the fort; reached the field of battle; picked up the muskets of the soldiers, and the half-pike of the brigadier; and, satisfied that the fugitives would never stop till they reached the town, they returned to the bastion, bearing with them the trophies of their victory.

"Reload, Grimaud," said Athos, "and let us, gentlemen, continue our breakfast and conversation. Where were we?"

"I recollect," said D'Artagnan; "you were saying, that, after having demanded my head of the cardinal, her ladyship had left the shores of France. And where is she going?" added D'Artagnan, who was painfully anxious about the lady's itinerary.

"She is going to England," replied Athos.

"And with what object?"

"To assassinate the Duke of Buckingham, or to get him assassinated."

D'Artagnan uttered an exclamation of surprise and indignation.

"It is infamous!" exclaimed he.

"Oh, as to that," said Athos, "I beg you to believe that I concern myself very little about it. Now that you have finished, Grimaud," continued he, "take the half-pike of

our brigadier, fasten a napkin to it, and fix it on the end of our bastion, that those rebellious Rochellais may see that they are opposed to brave and loyal subjects of the king."

Grimaud obeyed without reply: and an instant afterward the white flag floated over the heads of the four friends. A cry of joy, a thunder of applause saluted its appearance. Half the camp was at the barriers.

"What?" said D'Artagnan, "you concern yourself but little about her killing Buckingham, or causing him to be killed? The duke is our friend."

"The duke is an Englishman: the duke fights against us: let her do therefore as she likes with the duke. I care as little about him as an empty bottle."

As Athos said this, he threw, some fifteen yards before him, a bottle which he held in his hand, and from which he had just emptied the last drop into his own glass.

"Wait an instant," said D'Artagnan, "I will not abandon Buckingham in that manner; he gave us some very beautiful horses."

"And especially some very beautiful saddles," added Porthos, who was then wearing the gold lace of one of them upon his cloak.

"Besides," said Aramis, "God seeks for the conversion, not the death, of a sinner."

"Amen!" said Athos, "and we will return to that by and by, if such is your pleasure; but that which most engaged my attention at the time, and I am sure you will understand why, D'Artagnan, was how to get from this woman a *carte-blanche*, which she had extorted from the cardinal, and by means of which she might get rid of you, and perhaps the whole of us, with impunity.

"This creature is a very demon," said Porthos, holding his plate to Aramis, who was cutting up a fowl.

“And this document,” said D’Artagnan, “did it remain in her hands?”

“No, it passed into mine. I cannot say without some trouble; for, if I did, I should tell a lie.”

“My dear Athos,” said D’Artagnan, “I can no longer count the times I owe my life to you.”

“Then it was to visit her that you quitted us?” said Aramis.

“Exactly so.”

“And you have got the cardinal’s letter?” inquired D’Artagnan.

“Here it is,” replied Athos.

He took the precious paper from the pocket of his coat. D’Artagnan unfolded it with a hand, of which he did not attempt to hide the trembling, and read :

“It is by my order, and for the good of the state, that the bearer of this did that which he has now done.

“RICHELIEU.”

“It is, in fact, a regular absolution,” said Aramis.

“We must destroy this paper,” said D’Artagnan, who seemed to read in it his own sentence of death.

“On the contrary,” said Athos, “it must be most scrupulously preserved; and I would not give it up for the golden louis that would cover it.”

“And what will she do now?” inquired D’Artagnan.

“Why,” said Athos, carelessly, “she will write to the cardinal that a cursed musketeer named Athos took her safeguard from her by force; and she will, at the same time, advise his eminence to get rid of him, and also of his two friends, Porthos and Aramis. The cardinal will recollect that these are the very men that are always in his way. Then some fine morning, he will have D’Artagnan arrested, and, that he may not be bored to death by soli-

tude, will send us to keep him company in the Bastile."

"Ah!" said Porthos, "I think that you are making some rather dismal jokes."

"I am not joking," replied Athos.

"Do you know," said Porthos, "that I fancy it would be a more venial crime to twist this cursed lady's neck than those of these poor devils of Huguenots, who have never committed any greater crime than singing in French the very same psalms we sing in Latin."

"What does the abbé say to that?" quietly asked Athos.

"In that I am quite of Porthos's opinion."

"And I also," said D'Artagnan.

"Happily, she is far away," added Porthos; "for I confess she would much annoy me here."

"She annoys me in England, as well as in France," said Athos.

"She annoys me everywhere," said D'Artagnan.

"But, when you had her in your power," said Porthos, "why did you not drown, strangle, or hang her? It is only the dead who never return."

"Do you think so, Porthos?" said Athos, with a dark smile, which D'Artagnan alone could understand.

"I have an idea," said D'Artagnan.

"Let us hear it," cried the musketeers.

"*To arms!*" exclaimed Grimaud.

The young men arose hastily, and ran to their muskets.

This time there was a small band advancing, composed of twenty or five-and-twenty men, no longer pioneers, but soldiers of the garrison.

"Suppose we now return to the camp," said Porthos, "it seems to me that the match is not equal."

"Impossible, for three reasons," answered Athos.
"The first is, because we have not finished our breakfast."

The second, because we have still some important affairs to talk about; and the third, it will be still ten minutes before the hour elapses."

"But, nevertheless," said Aramis, "we must arrange a plan of battle."

"It is vastly simple," replied Athos. "As soon as the enemy is within musket-shot, we must fire; if he continues to advance, we must fire again; in fact we must fire away as long as we have guns loaded. If the remnant of the band should then wish to mount to the assault, we must let the besiegers descend as far as the ditch, and then we must heave on their heads a large mass of the wall, which only keeps up now by a miracle of equilibrium."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Porthos. "Athos, you are undoubtedly a born generalissimo, and the cardinal, who thinks himself a great warrior, is a mere corporal to you."

"Gentlemen," said Athos, "do not waste your ammunition, I beseech you; let each pick out his man."

"I have got mine," said D'Artagnan.

"And I mine," said Porthos.

"And I the same," said Aramis.

"Fire!" cried Athos.

The four guns made but one report, and four men fell.

The drum then beat, and the little band advanced to the charge.

The shots of the four friends were then fired without regularity, but invariably with the same deadly effect. Yet, as though they had known the numerical weakness of their opponents, the Rochellais continued to advance at a quick pace.

At three other shots, two men fell: yet the march of those who remained unwounded did not slacken.

Having reached the foot of the bastion, there were still twelve or fifteen of the enemy. A last discharge stag-

gered, but did not arrest them. They leaped into the ditch, and prepared to scale the breach.

"Now, my friends," said Athos, "let us finish them at one blow. To the wall ! to the wall ! "

And the four friends, assisted by Grimaud, set themselves to topple over, with the barrels of their muskets, an enormous mass of wall, which bowed as though the wind waved it, and loosening itself from its foundation, now fell with a tremendous crash into the ditch. A fearful cry was heard : a cloud of dust ascended toward the skies, and—all was over.

"Can we have crushed them all from the first to the last?" said Athos.

"Faith, it looks very like it," replied D'Artagnan.

"No," said Porthos ; "there are two or three of them escaping, quite crippled."

In fact, three or four of these unfortunate beings, covered with mire and blood, fled along the hollow way and regained the town. They were all that had not perished of the little band.

Athos looked at his watch.

"Gentlemen," said he, "we have been here an hour, and now the wager is gained ; but we will play our game triumphantly ; besides, D'Artagnan has not yet told us his idea."

And the musketeer, with his habitual coolness, seated himself beside the remains of the breakfast.

"Would you like to hear my plan ?" said D'Artagnan to his three companions, when, after the alarm which had had so fearful a termination for the little troop of Rochelais, they had resumed their places before the remnants of their meal.

"Yes," replied Athos ; "you said that you had an idea."

"Ah ! I have it," exclaimed D'Artagnan. "I will go to England for the second time, will find His Grace of

Buckingham, and warn him of the plot which has been formed against his life."

"You will do no such thing, D'Artagnan," said Athos, coldly.

"Why not? Did I not go before?"

"Yes, but at that time we were not at war; at that time the Duke of Buckingham was an ally, and not an enemy; what you now suggest would be denominated treason."

"But," said Porthos, "I fancy that I, in my turn, have also got an idea."

"Silence for M. Porthos's idea," cried Aramis.

"I will ask leave of absence of M. de Treville, on any pretext whatsoever that you can suggest; I am not very clever at excuses myself. The lady does not know me; I will get near her without exciting her alarm; and, when I have found the beauty, I will wring her neck."

"Ah," said Athos, "I really am somewhat disposed to suggest that we second Porthos's idea."

"Fie, fie!" exclaimed Aramis; "kill a woman! No! Listen, *I* have the right idea."

"Let us have your idea, Aramis," said Athos, who had much deference for the young musketeer.

"Let us tell all to the queen."

"Ah, faith, yes!" cried D'Artagnan and Porthos together; "I believe that we have found the true course at last."

"Announce it to the queen?" said Athos, "and how can we do that? Have we any connections at court? Can we send any one to Paris, without its becoming known all over the camp? There are a hundred and forty leagues between us and Paris, and our letter will hardly have reached Angers before we ourselves shall be in a dungeon."

"As for getting a letter safely delivered to the queen,"

said Aramis, blushing, "I myself will undertake it. I know a very skillful person at Tours—"

Aramis stopped—seeing Athos smile.

"Well! will you not adopt this plan, Athos?" inquired D'Artagnan.

"I do not entirely reject it," replied Athos, "but I would merely observe to Aramis, that he cannot himself leave the camp; and that, with anybody but one of ourselves, there will be not the slightest security that, two hours after the messenger has started, all the capucins, all the alguazils, all the black-bonnets of the cardinal, will not know your letter by heart; and your very skillful person immediately arrested."

"Without calculating," added Porthos, "that the queen would try to save the Duke of Buckingham, but would leave us to our fate."

"Gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, "Porthos' objection is full of sense!"

"Ah, ha! what is going on in the town?" said Athos.
"They are beating to arms."

The four friends listened, and the sound of the drum reached their ears.

"You will see," continued Athos, "that they will send an entire regiment against us."

"You do not expect us to stand our ground against an entire regiment?" said Porthos.

"Why not?" replied the musketeer. "I am just in the humor, and would hold it against an army, if we had only had the precaution to bring another dozen of wine!"

"Upon my word, the drum sounds nearer," said D'Artagnan.

"Let them come," replied Athos; "there is a quarter of an hour's march between the town and this place. It is more time than we shall require to arrange our plans. If we go away from here, we shall never again find such

a convenient spot. And listen, gentlemen : the most appropriate idea in the world has come into my mind."

"Let us hear it."

Athos made a sign for his valet to come to him.

"Grimaud," said Athos, pointing to the dead bodies, which lay in the bastion, "you will take these gentlemen, fix them upright against the wall, put their hats on their heads, and place their muskets in their hands."

"Oh, great man!" cried D'Artagnan, "I understand you."

"You understand?" said Porthos.

"And you, Grimaud, do you understand?" inquired Aramis.

Grimaud gave a sign in the affirmative.

"It is all that is necessary," said Athos: "now let us return to my idea."

"I should like, however, to understand——" said Porthos.

"It is of no use."

"Yes, yes Athos's idea!" cried D'Artagnan and Aramis at the same time.

"This lady, this woman, this creature, this viper, this demon, has a brother in-law, I think you told me?"

"Yes; I even know him, and I believe that he has no great sympathy with his sister in-law."

"There is no harm in that," replied Athos: "and if he detested her, even, it would be so much the more a virtue."

"In that case, we are fitted to a nicety."

"Nevertheless," said Porthos, "I should like to understand what Grimaud is about."

"Silence, Porthos!" cried Aramis.

"What is the name of this brother-in-law?"

"Lord de Winter."

"Where is he at present?"

"He returned to London on the first report of the war."

"Well, he is precisely the man we want," said Athos. "It is to him that we must give information; we must let him know that his sister-in-law is going to assassinate some one, and entreat him not to lose sight of her. There must be in London, I should hope, some establishment like the Madelonnettes, or the Magdalen: he must place his sister-in-law there, and we shall then be at peace."

"Yes," said D'Artagnan, "until she gets out again."

"Ah, faith," said Athos, "you ask too much, D'Artagnan. I have given you all that I have, and I tell you now my budget is exhausted."

"I think it is the best plan we can devise," observed Aramis: "we will inform the queen and Lord de Winter at the same time."

"But by whom shall we convey the one letter to London and the other to Tours?"

"I answer for Bazin," replied Aramis.

"And I for Planchet," added D'Artagnan.

"In fact," said Porthos, "if we cannot leave the camp, our servants can."

"Certainly," added Aramis; "so we will write the letters this very day, give them sufficient money, and send them on the journey."

"We will give them sufficient money?" said Athos: "then you have got money, have you?"

The four friends looked at each other, and a cloud passed over the brows which had been for an instant brightened.

"Attention," cried D'Artagnan; "I see black and red points in movement below there. What were you saying about a regiment, Athos? It is a regular army."

"Faith, yes," replied Athos, "there they are. Do you

see the crafty fellows who are advancing without drum or trumpet! Ah, ah! Have you finished, Grimaud?"

Grimaud gave a sign in the affirmative, and pointed to a dozen dead bodies, which he had placed in the most picturesque attitudes—some carrying arms, others seeming to take aim, others sword in hand.

"Bravo!" cried Athos, "that does credit to your imagination."

"It is all the same," said Porthos; "and yet I should like to understand it."

"Let us decamp first," said D'Artagnan; "you will understand afterward."

"One moment, gentlemen—wait one moment; let us give Grimaud time to take away the breakfast things."

"Ah!" said Aramis, "here are the black and red points becoming visibly larger, and I am of D'Artagnan's opinion: I believe that we have no time to lose in regaining the camp."

"Faith," said Athos, "I have nothing more to say against a retreat: we betted for one hour, and we have remained an hour and a half. There is nothing more to argue or communicate: so let us be off, gentlemen, let us be off."

Grimaud had already commenced his retreat, with the basket and the fragments. The four friends followed behind him, and took about a dozen steps.

"Ah! What the plague are we about, gentlemen?" exclaimed Athos.

"Have you forgotten anything?" inquired Aramis.

"The flag: zounds! we must not leave a flag in the hands of the enemy, even when that flag is only a table-cloth."

And Athos rushed back into the bastion, mounted the platform, and took down the flag.

But, as the Rochellais had come within musket-shot,

they opened a sharp fire upon this man who thus exposed himself, as if for amusement, to their discharge. It might have been fancied, however, that Athos bore a charmed life; the bullets whizzed around him, yet he stood unharmed.

Athos waved his standard, as he turned his back on the town, and bowed toward the camp. Loud shouts resounded on both sides—shouts of anger from the one; and, from the other, of enthusiasm.

A second discharge soon followed the first, and three balls, by passing through it, made a regular standard of the table-cloth.

They heard the whole camp exclaiming—"Come down! come down!"

Athos slowly descended. His companions, who waited for him with anxiety, welcomed his reappearance with joy.

"Come along, Athos, come along," said D'Artagnan; "let us make haste. Now that we have found everything except money, it would be absurd to get killed."

But Athos persisted in his majestic walk; and his companions, finding all remonstrance useless, regulated their pace by his.

Grimaud and his basket formed the advance guard; and were both soon out of range.

After a minute or two they heard the sound of furious firing.

"What is that?" asked Porthos: "at what are they firing! I do not hear the bullets whistle, nor do I see anybody."

"They are firing at our *dead men!* " replied Athos.

"But our dead men will not return their fire."

"Exactly so. They will then believe that there is an ambuscade; they will deliberate, and will afterward re-



"AIBOS WAVED HIS STANDARD."

connoiter ; and by the time they discover the trick, we shall be beyond the reach of their fire. Thus, you see, it is unnecessary to give ourselves a fit of the pleurisy by overhaste."

"Oh ! I understand now !" said the admiring Porthos.

"That's very fortunate," replied Athos, shrugging his shoulders.

The French on their side, perceiving their adventurous comrades returning, uttered cries of frantic enthusiasm.

At length, a fresh firing was heard, and this time the bullets were actually flattened on the stones around the four friends, and whistled mournfully about their ears. The Rochellais had at last taken possession of the bastion.

"They are a set of awkward fellows," remarked Athos : " how many of them have we killed ? A dozen ?"

"Or fifteen."

"How many did we make jelly of ?"

"Eight or ten."

"And, in exchange for this, we have not got a scratch. Ah ! yes, though ! What is the matter there with your hand, D'Artagnan ? It is bleeding."

"It is nothing," replied D'Artagnan.

"Was it a spent ball ?"

"No."

"What then ?"

We have said that Athos loved D'Artagnan as his own son and thought of a gloomy and inflexible character, he sometimes manifested toward the young man a solicitude truly paternal.

"Merely a scratch," replied D'Artagnan. "I caught my fingers between two stones—that of the wall and that of my ring—and the skin is cut."

"See what it is to wear diamonds, my master," said Athos, contemptuously.

“ Ah !” exclaimed Porthos, “ there is a diamond, in fact ; and why the plague, then, as there is a diamond, do we battle about having no money ? ”

“ See, there, now,” said Aramis.

“ Well done, Porthos ; this time you really have an idea.”

“ Certainly,” continued Porthos, bridling up at Athos’s compliment ; “ and since there is a diamond, let us sell it.”

“ But,” said D’Artagnan, “ it is the queen’s diamond.”

“ One reason more,” said Athos—“ the queen saving the Duke of Buckingham, her lover ; nothing can be more just—the queen saving us, her friends : nothing can be more moral. Let us sell the diamond. What does the abbé say ? I do not ask Porthos’s opinion—it is already given.”

“ Why, I think,” said Aramis, blushing, “ that as the ring does not come from a mistress, and, consequently, is not a love token, D’Artagnan may sell it.”

“ My dear fellow, you speak like theology personified. So your advice is——”

“ To sell the diamond,” replied Aramis.

“ Well,” said D’Artagnan gayly, “ let us sell the diamond, and say no more about it.”

The fusillade still continued, but the friends were beyond its reach, and the Rochellais seemed to be firing only for the satisfaction of their own pugnacity.

“ Faith,” said Athos, “ it was quite time for this idea of Porthos to present itself ; for here we are at the camp. So now, gentlemen, not another word about this business. We are observed. They are coming to meet us, and we shall be carried home in triumph.”

In fact, as we have already said, the whole camp was in commotion. More than two thousand soldiers had witnessed, as at a theater, the fortune-favored bravado of the four friends—a bravado of which they had been far

from suspecting the true motive. Nothing could be heard but cries of "Long live the guards! Long live the musketeers!" M. de Busigny was the first who came to press the hand of Athos, and to confess that he had lost his bet. The dragoon and the Swiss followed him; and all their comrades followed the dragoon and the Swiss. There was no end to the congratulations, shaking of hands, embraces and inextinguishable laughter at the Rochellais; and, last, the tumult was so great that the cardinal supposed there was a mutiny, and sent La Hou-diniere, the captain of his guards, to ascertain the cause of the disturbance. The incident was related to his messenger with all the warmth of enthusiasm.

"Well?" demanded the cardinal, on seeing La Hou-diniere return.

"Well, my lord," replied the latter, "it is three musketeers and a guardsman, who laid a bet with M. de Busigny to go and breakfast in the bastion of St. Gervais; and who, whilst at breakfast, maintained their ground for two hours against the Rochellais, and killed I know not how many of the enemy."

"Did you learn the names of these musketeers?"

"Yes, my lord."

"What are they?"

"Messrs. Athos, Porthos, and Aramis."

"Always my three brave fellows!" muttered the cardinal. "And the guard?"

"M. d'Artagnan."

"My young madcap again! Decidedly these four men must be mine."

On the same evening, the cardinal spoke to M. de Treville of the exploit, which formed the subject of conversation throughout the whole camp. M. de Treville, who had heard the recital of the adventure from the lips of those who were its heroes, recounted it in all its

particulars to his eminence, without forgetting the episode of the table-cloth flag.

"Very good, M. de Treville," said the cardinal; "give me this glorious standard, I entreat you. I will get three fleurs-de-lis embroidered on it in gold, and will give it to you as the battle-flag of your company."

"My lord," said M. de Treville, "that would be unjust towards the guards. M. d'Artagnan does not belong to me, but to M. des Essarts."

"Well, then, take him yourself," said the cardinal, "it is hardly fair that these four brave soldiers, who love each other so well should not serve in the same company."

On the same evening, M. de Treville announced this good news to the three musketeers, and to D'Artagnan, inviting them all four to breakfast with him on the following day.

D'Artagnan could not contain himself for joy. We know that the dream of his life had been to be a musketeer.

The three friends were also profoundly delighted.

"Faith," said D'Artagnan to Athos, "yours was a triumphant idea; and as you said, we have gained glory by it, besides being able to hold a conversation of the greatest importance."

"Which we may henceforth renew without suspicion; for, with God's help, we shall henceforth be looked upon as cardinalists."

On the same evening D'Artagnan went to pay his respects to M. des Essarts, and to inform him of his promotion.

M. des Essarts, who had great affection for D'Artagnan, offered him any assistance that he might require, as this change of regiment brought with it the expense of a new equipment.

D'Artagnan declined this aid ; but thinking the opportunity a good one, he requested him to ascertain the value of the diamond, which he placed in his hands, stating that he wished him to turn it into money.

At eight o'clock the next morning, M. des Essarts' valet came to D'Artagnan, and handed to him a bag, containing seven thousand livres in gold. It was the price of the queen's diamond.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A FAMILY AFFAIR.

ATHOS had hit upon the right expression. It was necessary to make Buckingham's *a family affair!* A family affair was not subjected to the investigation of the cardinal. A family affair concerned no one; they might occupy themselves before all the world about a family affair.

Aramis had found the idea—the valets !

Porthos had found the means—the diamond !

D'Artagnan alone, generally the most inventive of the four, contributed nothing ;—save the sinews of war—but we must confess that the very name of My Lady paralyzed him.

The breakfast at M. de Treville's was charmingly gay. D'Artagnan had already got his uniform. As he was about the same size as Aramis, and as Aramis, being so handsomely paid, as may be remembered, by the book-sellers who had bought his poem, had doubly furnished himself with everything, he had accommodated his friend with a complete equipment.

D'Artagnan would have been supremely happy, had he not seen her ladyship like a dark cloud on the horizon.

After breakfast, they agreed to meet again in the evening at Athos' quarters, in order to terminate their arrangements.

D'Artagnan passed the day in displaying his musketeer's uniform in every avenue throughout the camp.

At the appointed time in the evening, the four friends assembled. There were but three things to settle ; what they should write to the lady's brother-in-law ; what they should write to the clever person at Tours ; and which of the valets should be the bearer of the letters.

For the latter purpose, each offered his own. Athos vaunted the discretion of Grimaud, who only spoke when his master permitted him to open his mouth ; Porthos boasted of the strength of Musqueton, who was big enough to drub four men of ordinary dimensions ; Aramis, confident in the address of Bazin, made a pompous eulogium on his candidate ; and lastly, D'Artagnan had entire confidence in Planchet's bravery, and recalled to their minds how well he had behaved in their most hazardous encounter at Boulogne.

These four virtues for a long time contended for mastery, and gave occasion for some magnificent speeches, which we shall not report lest they should be deemed tiresome.

"Unhappily," said Athos, "it is necessary that he whom we send should possess in himself all the four qualities united.

"But where can we find such a servant?"

"It is impossible, I know," said Athos ; "so take Grimaud."

"Take Musqueton."

"Take Bazin."

"Take Planchet ; he is brave and skillful ; so there are two qualities out of the four."

"Gentlemen," said Aramis, "the chief thing is not to know which of our four valets is the most discreet, the strongest, the most skillful, or the bravest, but to find out which of them is the fondest of money."

"Aramis talks sound sense," said Athos ; "it is necessary to calculate upon the defects of mankind, and

not upon their virtues. M. Abbé, you are a great moralist."

"Unquestionably so," said Aramis; "for we need to be well served, not only to succeed, but that we may not fail; since, in case of failure, it will endanger the head, not of the valet——"

"Not so loud, Aramis," said Athos.

"You are right—not of the valet," resumed Aramis, "but of the master, or even of the masters. Are our valets sufficiently devoted to us to hazard their lives for us? No."

"Faith" said D'Artagnan, "I would almost answer for Planchet?"

"Well, then, my dear friend, add to that devotedness a good round sum, which will secure him some independence, and instead of answering for him once, you may answer twice."

"*Diantré!* you will be deceived just as much," said Athos, who was an optimist on reasoning on events, and a pessimist when reasoning on men; "they will promise everything to get money, and when occasion comes, fear will prevent them acting. Once taken, they will be imprisoned: and, when imprisoned, they will confess everything. What the plague! we are not children! To get to England (Athos lowered his voice) we must pass through the whole of France, which is thickly sown with the spies and creatures of the cardinal. Then a passport is necessary for embarkation; then, English must be spoken, to find the way to London. Ah, I see that it is a very difficult affair!"

"Not at all," said D'Artagnan, who was very anxious that the thing should be accomplished; "I can see that it is easy enough. We know, without being told, egad! that if we wrote to Lord de Winter, loudly proclaiming all manner of enormities concerning the cardinal——"

"No so loud!" said Athos.

"Or communicating state secrets and intrigues," continued D'Artagnan, acting on his friend's warning. "We know, without a prophet, that we should all be broken on the wheel. But, for God's sake! do not forget what you have said yourself, Athos—that we only write about a family affair—that we write with the sole motive of getting this lady, as soon as she arrives in London, placed in such a situation that she cannot hurt us. I would therefore write him a letter in something like these terms."

"Now let us hear," said Aramis, putting on a critical face beforehand.

"Sir, and dear friend—"

"Ah, yes! 'dear friend,' to an Englishman!" broke in Athos. "Well begun! Bravo, D'Artagnan! For that word alone you will be quartered instead of broken on the wheel."

"Well, then, I would say 'sir'—quite short."

"You might even say 'my lord,'" rejoined Athos, who thought a good deal of propriety.

"My lord—Do you remember the little inclosure for goats, near the Luxembourg?"

"Good! The Luxembourg, indeed! That will be taken for an allusion to the queen-mother. How very ingenious!" said Athos.

"Well, then, we will simply say: 'My lord—Do you remember a certain little inclosure where your life was saved?'"

"My dear D'Artagnan," said Athos, "you never will be anything but a vastly bad composer. Where your life was saved! For shame! It is not dignified: no one reminds a gallant man of such services. A benefit reproached is always an insult."

"Ah, my dear fellow!" said D'Artagnan, "you are

unbearable, and if one must write under your critical eye, I renounce it."

"And you do wisely. Handle the sword and the musket, my dear boy—you perform those exercises admirably well—but give up the pen to the abbé: it is his vocation."

"Yes," said Porthos, "give up the pen to Aramis, who writes theses in Latin."

"Very well, so be it," answered D'Artagnan. "Compose this note for us, Aramis; but by our holy father, the pope, mind what you are about, for I shall criticise you in turn, I warn you."

"I ask nothing better," said Aramis, with that natural confidence which every poet has in himself; "but first make me acquainted with all the circumstances. I have indeed heard, now and then, that his sister-in-law is a demirep. I have, in fact, got proof of it by listening to her conversation with the cardinal."

"Zounds! Not so loud, then," cried Athos.

"But," continued Aramis, "the particulars I do not know."

"Nor I either," said Porthos.

D'Artagnan and Athos looked at one another for some time in silence. At last Athos, having collected himself, and become even paler than usual, gave a sign of assent: and D'Artagnan understood that he might speak.

"Well, then, here is what you must write," resumed D'Artagnan.

"My lord—Your sister-in-law is a wicked woman, who wished to have you killed in order to obtain your inheritance. But she could not marry your brother, being already married in France, and having been"—D'Artagnan stopped, as if he were seeking for the right word, and looked at Athos.

"Driven away by her husband," said Athos.

"Because she had been branded," continued D'Artagnan.

"Bah!" cried Porthos: "impossible! And did she wish to have her brother-in-law killed?"

"Yes."

"And she was married?" demanded Aramis.

"Yes."

"And her husband found out that she had a fleur-de-lis on her shoulder?" cried Porthos.

"Yes."

Three times had Athos uttered this "yes," each time in a more gloomy tone.

"And who saw this fleur-de-lis?" demanded Aramis.

"D'Artagnan and myself, or, rather, to observe the chronological order, I and D'Artagnan," replied Athos.

"And the husband of this horrible creature is yet alive?" inquired Aramis.

"He still lives."

"You are quite sure of it?"

"I am certain of it."

There was a moment of profound silence, during which each felt himself affected according to his disposition.

"This time," said Athos, first breaking the silence, "D'Artagnan has given us a good beginning, and it is that which we must write first."

"The devil!" said Aramis; "you are right, Athos, and the composition is difficult. The chancellor himself would be puzzled to compose an epistle of this significance, and yet the chancellor draws up a criminal process very agreeably. Never mind—be quiet—I will write."

Aramis took the pen, reflected for a few moments, and then wrote eight or ten lines in a charming little feminine hand; then, in a soft and slow voice, as if every word had been scrupulously weighed, he read as follows:

“ MY LORD,—The person who writes these few lines had the honor of crossing swords with you in a little inclosure in the Rue de l’Enfer. As you have been kind enough, since, often to declare yourself the friend of that person, he is bound to acknowledge that friendship by an important warning. You have twice escaped being the victim of a near relation, whom you consider your heiress, because you know not that before contracting her marriage in England, she had already been married in France. But the third time, which is this, you might become her victim. Your relation has left La Rochelle for England during the night. Watch for her arrival, for she has great and terrible designs. If you wish really to know of what she is capable, read her past life on her left shoulder.”

“ Well, that is admirable,” said Athos : “ and you have the pen of a secretary of state, my dear Aramis. De Winter will keep a good look-out now, provided he receives the letter ; and, should it ever fall into the hands of his eminence, we could not be compromised. But, as the valet whom we send might make us believe he had been to London, whilst he only stopped at Châtellerault, give him only half the sum, promising him the other half in exchange for the answer. Have you the diamond ? ” continued Athos.

“ I have better than that,” replied D’Artagnan, “ I have got the money ; ” and he threw the bag upon the table.

At the sound of the gold, Aramis lifted up his eyes, Porthos started, and as for Athos, he remained unmoved.

“ How much is there in this little bag ? ” said he.

“ Seven thousand livres, in louis of twelve francs.”

“ Seven thousand livres ! ” exclaimed Porthos. “ Was that paltry little diamond worth seven thousand livres ? ”

“ So it seems,” said Athos, “ since there they are. I

presume that our friend D'Artagnan has not put in any of his own."

"But, gentlemen," continued D'Artagnan; "we forget the queen. Let us take some little care of the health of her dear Buckingham. It is the least that we owe her."

"That is true," said Athos; "but this concerns Aramis."

"Well," replied the latter, coloring, "what must I do?"

"Why," replied Athos, "it is very simple; just compose a second letter to that clever person who lives at Tours."

Aramis resumed the pen, began to reflect again, and wrote the following lines, which he submitted immediately to the approbation of his friends:

"My dear Cousin——"

"Ah, ha!" said Athos, "this clever person is your relation!"

"Cousin-german," replied Aramis.

"Be it cousin then."

Aramis continued:

"**M**Y DEAR COUSIN,—His eminence the cardinal, whom may God preserve for the happiness of France and the confusion of the enemies of the realm, is about to exterminate the rebellious heretics of La Rochelle. It is probable that the aid of the English fleet will not even arrive in time within sight of the place. I might almost venture to say, that I am certain his grace of Buckingham will be prevented from leaving England by some great event. His eminence is the most illustrious politician of time past, time present, and most probably of time to come. He would extinguish the sun, if the sun were in his way. Give this happy intelligence to your sister, my dear cousin. I dreamed that this cursed Englishman was dead. I do not remember whether it was by poison or the sword, only, I am sure that he was dead; and you

know that my dreams are always fulfilled. Be assured, therefore, that you will shortly see me return."

"Wonderfully good!" said Athos, "You are the king of poets, my dear Aramis; you speak like the apocalypse, yet are as true as the Gospel. There only remains, now, the address to put upon this letter."

"That is easy enough," said Aramis.

He folded the letter in a coquettish manner, and wrote: "Mademoiselle Michon, seamstress, at Tours."

The three friends looked at one another, and laughed. They were caught.

"Now, gentlemen," said Aramis, "you understand that Bazin alone can convey this letter to Tours. My cousin knows only Bazin, and will trust to no one else. To send any other messenger would only insure a failure. Besides, Bazin is ambitious and learned. Bazin has read history, gentlemen: he knows that Sextus the Fifth became pope after having kept swine; and, as he intends to enter the church at the same time with myself, he does not despair of becoming himself a pope, or at any rate a cardinal. You will understand that a man who has such views will not allow himself to be caught, or, if he should be caught, will rather suffer martyrdom than speak."

"Very well," said D'Artagnan, "I allow you Bazin with all my heart; only allow me Planchet. Her ladyship once sent him away well cudgeled. Now Planchet has a good memory, and I promise you, that, if he thought revenge possible, he would allow himself to be broken on the wheel rather than not effect it. If the business at Tours belongs peculiarly to you, that in London is peculiarly mine. So I entreat you to choose Planchet, who has, also, already been to London with me, and knows how to say, very correctly—'London, sir, if you please;' and, 'my master, Lord D'Artagnan.' You may be quite sure that

with this knowledge, he will find his way there and back."

"In that case," said Athos, "Planchet must receive seven hundred livres for each half of his journey, and Bazin three hundred: That will reduce the sum to five thousand livres. We shall each take a thousand livres, to spend as we please, and we shall leave a fund of a thousand, in care of the abbe for extraordinary expenses and our common wants. What do you say to that?"

"My dear Athos," said Aramis, "you speak like Nestor, who was, as everybody knows, the wisest of the Greeks."

"Then it is settled," continued Athos: "Planchet and Bazin will set off. After all, I am not sorry to keep Grimaud: he is accustomed to my ways, and I can depend upon him. Yesterday's expedition must have rather shaken him already; and this voyage would undo him altogether."

Planchet was sent for to receive his instructions. He had already received some intimation of the journey from his master, who had announced to him, first, the glory; then, the profit; and lastly, the danger.

"I shall carry the letter in the lining of my coat," said Planchet, "and swallow it if I am taken."

"But then you will be unable to perform your commission," said D'Artagnan.

"You will give me a copy this evening, which I shall know by heart to-morrow."

D'Artagnan looked at his friends, as much as to say—"Well, did I not tell you so?"

"Now," continued he, addressing Planchet, "you have eight days to reach Lord de Winter, and eight days to return here: that is, sixteen days in all. If, on the sixteenth day from your departure you have not arrived at eight o'clock in the evening, not a farthing more money

shall you have, though you were only later by five minutes."

"Then, sir," said Planchet, "buy me a watch."

"Here, take this," said Athos, with heedless generosity, giving him his own, "and be a brave lad. Consider that, if you talk, if you babble, if you loiter, you will sacrifice the head of your master, who has so much confidence in your fidelity that he has answered for you to us. But remember, also, that if, by any fault of yours, any such calamity should come upon D'Artagnan, I will hunt you out wherever you may be, and will completely perforate you."

"Oh, sir!" cried Planchet, humiliated at the suspicion, and particularly alarmed by the calmness of the musketeer.

"And I," said Porthos, rolling his great eyes, "remember that I will skin you alive."

"Ah, sir!"

"And I," said Aramis, with his soft and melodious voice, "remember, that I will roast you at a slow fire, as if you were an uncultivated savage."

"Ah, sir!"

And Planchet began to cry; but we cannot venture to say whether it was from terror on account of the threats he had heard, or from being affected at seeing so close a union of hearts between the four friends.

D'Artagnan took his hand. "You see, Planchet," said he, "that these gentlemen speak thus from affection toward me; but, notwithstanding all this, they esteem you."

"Ah! sir," said Planchet, "I shall either succeed, or I shall be cut into quarters; and, were I even quartered, you may rely upon it that not one piece of me will speak."

It was decided that Planchet should start the next day, at eight in the morning, in order that, as he said, he

might, during the night, have time to learn the letter by heart. He gained just twelve hours by this arrangement, as he was to return at eight o'clock in the evening of the sixteenth day.

Just as he was about to mount his horse in the morning, D'Artagnan, who felt his heart incline toward Buckingham, took Planchet aside.

"Listen," said he: "when you have delivered your letter to Lord de Winter, and he has read it, say to him, 'Watch over the Duke of Buckingham, for they are seeking to assassinate him. But this, do you see, Planchet, is a thing of such momentous importance that I would not even confess to my friends that I have confided the secret to you; and even, for a captain's commission, I would not write it down.'"

"Be easy, sir," said Planchet; "you shall see whether you can trust me."

Mounted on an excellent horse, which he was to leave at twenty leagues from La Rochelle, to take the post, Planchet went off at a gallop, his heart a little shaken by the threats of the musketeers, but, on the whole, in a most favorable state of mind.

Bazin left the next morning for Tours, and was allowed eight days for his expedition.

The four friends, during the whole time of their absence had, as may be well supposed, their eyes more than ever on the watch, their noses in the wind, and their ears upon the alert. The days were consumed in trying to catch every report, to watch the motions of the cardinal, and to scent out the couriers who arrived. More than once an unconquerable anxiety seized them, on being sent for on some unexpected service. They had also to be watchful of their own safety: her ladyship was a phantom, who, having once appeared to any one, would never more allow him to sleep in tranquillity.

On the morning of the eighth day Bazin, fresh as ever, and smiling as usual, entered the room at the Parpaillot, just as the four friends were going to breakfast, saying, according to the agreement they had made :

“M. Aramis, here is the answer from your cousin.”

The four friends exchanged a joyful glance. Half their work was done : it is true that it was the shortest and the easiest half.

Aramis took the letter, blushing in spite of himself. The writing was vulgar, and the spelling wretched.

“Good God,” said he laughing, “I decidedly despair of her. This poor Michon will never write like M. de Voiture !”

“Who does that mean—‘this poor Michon?’ ” asked the Swiss, who was getting into a gossip with the four friends when the letter was brought.

“Oh, my God ! less than nothing,” replied Aramis. “She is a charming little seamstress with whom I was very much in love and from whom I have begged a few lines, in her own handwriting, by way of remembrance.”

“Egad ! ” said the Swiss, “if she is as ladylike as her own penmanship, you must be a happy fellow, comrade.”

Aramis read the letter, and handed it to Athos.

“Just see what she writes, Athos,” said he.

Athos threw a glance over the letter, and then, to destroy any suspicions which might have been awakened, read it aloud :

“Cousin,—My sister and I understand dreams very well, and we are shockingly frightened at them ; but of yours it may be said, I hope—all dreams are false. Adieu ! Take care of yourself, and let us hear of you from time to time.

“AGLAË MICHON.”

“What dream is she talking about ? ” asked the dragoon,

who had come up whilst they were reading the letter.

"Yes, what dream?" said the Swiss."

"Oh! Egad!" said Aramis, "it is plain enough: about a dream of mine that I told them."

"Ah yes," said the Swiss, "it is quite natural to tell one's dreams; but, for my part, I never dream at all."

"You are very fortunate," said Athos, rising, "and I wish I could say the same thing."

"Never," repeated the Swiss, delighted that a man like Athos should envy him in anything—"never, never!"

D'Artagnan, seeing Athos rise, did the same, and took his arm and left the room.

Porthos and Aramis remained behind to face the gossip of the Swiss and the dragoon.

As for Bazin, he went to sleep upon a truss of straw, and, as he had more imagination than the Swiss, he dreamt that M. Aramis who had become pope, was placing on his head a cardinal's hat.

But, as we have already said, Bazin had, by his happy return, removed only a part of the uneasiness which tormented the four friends. The days of expectation are always long, and D'Artagnan, especially, could have sworn that each of these days was eight-and-forty hours long. He forgot the unavoidable delays of navigation; he exaggerated the power of her ladyship; he gave to this woman, who appeared to him to resemble a demon, auxiliaries as supernatural as herself; and he fancied, at every noise, that they were coming to arrest him, or were bringing Planchet to be confronted with himself and his friends. And, more than that, his extraordinary confidence in the worthy Picard diminished day by day. This anxiety was so powerful that it affected Porthos and Aramis. Athos alone remained unmoved, as though no danger filled the air around him, and he breathed in his habitual atmosphere.

On the sixteenth day, particularly, these signs of agitation were so perceptible in D'Artagnan and his two friends, that they could not remain in one place, and wandered about like shadows on the road by which Planchet was expected to return.

"Really," said Athos, "you are not men : you are only children, to let a woman frighten you so much. And, after all, what is that you fear? To be imprisoned? Well, we should be released from prison, as Madame Bonancieux has been. To be beheaded? Why, we gladly expose ourselves, every day, in the trenches, to worse than that; for a bullet might break a leg ; and I am quite sure that a surgeon puts one to more pain in amputating a thigh, than an executioner in cutting off one's head. So, wait calmly ; in two, four, six hours at the latest, Planchet will be here. He has given us his promise ; and I for my part, have great confidence in the promise of Planchet, who seems to me a very worthy lad."

"But if he should not come?" said D'Artagnan.

"Well, and if he should not come, he has been delayed —that's all. He may have fallen from his horse ; he may have made a somersault over a bridge ; he may have brought on pleurisy by running too quickly. Come, gentlemen, let us allow for accident. Life is a long chaplet of little miseries, which the philosopher shakes with a laugh. Be philosophers, like me, gentlemen : come around the table, and let us drink. Nothing gives the future so rosy a hue, as to look at it through a glass of chambertin.

"That is all very good," replied D'Artagnan ; "but I am weary of imagining, every time I drink, that the wine may have come from her ladyship's cellar."

"You are very fastidious," said Athos. "Such a beautiful woman!"

"A woman with a brand!" said Porthos, with his horse-laugh.

Athos started, passed his hand over his forehead, to wipe off the perspiration, and rose, in his turn, with a nervous agitation that he was unable to restrain.

The day, however, glided on, and the evening came more slowly : but at last, it did come. The taverns were full of customers. Athos, who had pocketed his share of the diamond, now scarcely ever left the Parpaillot. He had found in M. de Busigny, who, moreover, had given them a superb dinner, a partner worthy of himself. They were playing together, according to custom, when the clock struck seven : they heard the patrols passing on their way to double the sentinels. At half-past seven the drums beat the retreat.

"We are lost," whispered D'Artagnan in Athos's ear.

"You mean to say that we *have* lost," replied Athos with great tranquillity, drawing at the same time ten pistoles from his pocket, and throwing them upon the table. "Come, gentlemen," continued he, "that is the last drum ; let us go to bed."

And Athos left the Parpaillot, followed by D'Artagnan. Aramis came behind, giving his arm to Porthos ; Aramis was mouthing verses ; and Porthos, from time to time, tore a few hairs from his mustache, in token of despair. But behold, suddenly, in the darkness there appeared the shadow of a form familiar to D'Artagnan, and a well-known voice said to him—

"Sir, I have brought you your cloak, for it is cold this evening."

"Planchet !" exclaimed D'Artagnan, intoxicated with joy.

"Planchet !" exclaimed Aramis and Porthos.

"Well—yes, Planchet," said Athos, "what is there surprising in that? He promised to be back by eight o'clock and it is now just striking eight. Bravo, Planchet! You are a man of your word, and, if ever you leave

your master, I shall keep a place for you in my service."

"Oh, no, never!" said Planchet; "I shall never leave M. d'Artagnan."

And at the same moment D'Artagnan felt Planchet slip a small note into his hand.

D'Artagnan had a great longing to embrace Planchet: but he was afraid such a mark of delight, conferred upon his valet in the public street, would look rather odd to any passer-by; so he restrained himself. "I have got the letter," said he to Athos and his friends.

"Very well," said Athos, "let us go to our quarters, and read it."

The letter burnt the hand of D'Artagnan. He wished to hurry on; but Athos kept a firm hold of his arm, and the young man was compelled to regulate his speed by that of his friend.

They reached their tent at last, and lighted a lamp; and whilst Planchet stood at the door, to see that the four friends were not interrupted, D'Artagnan, with a trembling hand broke the seal, and opened the long-looked-for-letter.

It contained half a line of writing truly British, and of a brevity truly Spartan:

"Thank you; be easy."

Athos took the letter from D'Artagnan's hand, put it to the lamp, lighted it, and did not quit his hold until it was reduced to ashes. Then, calling Planchet:

"Now, my boy," said he, "you have a right to the other seven hundred livres: but you did not run much risk, with such a letter as that."

"Nevertheless, I have invented a great many ways of securing it," replied Planchet.

"Well," said D'Artagnan, "tell us all about it."

"But it is a long story, sir," answered he.

“ You are right, Planchet,” said Athos; “ besides, the last drum has sounded, and we shall be observed if we burn our light longer than other people.”

“ Well, then, let us go to bed,” said D’Artagnan; “ sleep well, Planchet !”

“ Faith, sir, it will be the first time in sixteen days.”

“ And for me also,” said D’Artagnan.

“ And for me, too !” exclaimed Porthos.

“ And me, too !” re-echoed Aramis.

“ Well, shall I confess the truth? and for me, too!”
said Athos.

CHAPTER XLIX.

FATALITY.

IN the meantime My Lady—intoxicated with rage and roaring on the vessel's deck like an excited lioness—had been even tempted to cast herself into the sea : for she could not bring herself to brook the thought that she had been insulted by D'Artagnan, and threatened by Athos, and was now quitting France without having obtained revenge. So insupportable had this idea at last become, that, at the risk of the most terrible consequences to herself, she had entreated the captain to land her on the French coast. But the captain, anxious to escape from his false position—where he was placed between the English and French cruisers, like a bat between the rats and birds—was in great haste to reach England. He obstinately refused, therefore, to obey what he regarded as the whim of a capricious woman. He promised however, to his passenger, who had been particularly recommended to his care by the cardinal, to land her at some port in Brittany, either Brest or Lorient, should the weather and the French permit. But, in the meantime the wind was contrary and the sea rough ; they tacked about continually ; and nine days after her departure from Clarente, her ladyship, pale from grief and rage, saw only the blue shores of Finisterre.

She calculated that, to traverse that angle of France and return to the cardinal, would take her at least three days ; add one day for landing, and that would make four. Add these four to the nine already elapsed, and here were

thirteen lost days—thirteen days, during which so many important events might have occurred in London. She considered that the cardinal would undoubtedly be furious at her return, and consequently, would be more disposed to listen to any accusations which might be made against her, than to those which she might make against others. She therefore did not renew her entreaties and permitted the captain to carry her past Lorient and Brest; and he on his part, was careful not to remind her of her wishes. She thus continued her voyage; and on the very day that Planchet embarked at Portsmouth to return to France, the messenger of his eminence entered triumphantly the port.

The whole town was in a state of extraordinary excitement. Four large ships, recently built, had just been launched into the sea. Standing on the jetty, covered with gold, and glittering as usual with diamonds and precious stones, his hat adorned with a white plume which drooped upon his shoulder, Buckingham was visible, surrounded by a staff almost as brilliant as himself.

It was one of those few and fine summer days when Englishmen remember that there is a sun. The pale but still splendid luminary was just dropping below the horizon, making the heavens and the sea crimson with bands of fire, and casting a last golden ray on the towers and the old buildings of the town, the windows of which gleamed as with the reflection of a conflagration. Her ladyship—as she inhaled the sea breeze, which is fresher and more balmy in the vicinity of land, and as she contemplated all those mighty preparations which she was ordered to destroy, and all the might of that armament against which she, a woman, had come to contend alone, with a few bags of gold—mentally compared herself to Judith, the fearful Jewess, when she penetrated into the

camp of the Assyrians, and saw the enormous mass of chariots, of horses, of men, and of arms which one movement of her hand was to dissipate like a cloud of smoke.

They entered the roads, but, just as they were making ready to cast anchor, a small strongly-armed cutter presented itself as a coast-guard, approached the merchant-vessel, and put off its boat, which was steered towards them. The boat contained an officer, a lieutenant, and eight men. The officer alone came on board, where he was received with all the respect which his uniform inspired.

The officer conversed for a few minutes with the captain, and inspected some papers, which he brought with him; and then, on the captain's order, all the crew and passengers of the vessel were mustered upon the deck. When this had been done, the officer inquired aloud, as to where the brig had come from, what had been its course, and where it had put in; and to all these questions the captain replied satisfactorily, without hesitation or difficulty. The officer then began to examine all the persons on deck, one after the other, and stopping at her ladyship, he looked at her very earnestly, but without uttering a single word.

Having returned to the captain, and made some new communication to him, the officer, as if he had now taken command of the vessel, gave an order which the crew immediately executed. By this means, the vessel was put again in motion; but it was still escorted by the little cutter, which kept beside it, menacing its broadside with the mouths of her cannons; the boat followed in the vessel's wake, an object scarcely visible behind the enormous mass.

Whilst the officer had been examining her ladyship, she, as may be well imagined, had, on her side, not failed to scrutinize him most intently. But however much this woman, with her eye of flame was accustomed to read

the hearts of those whose secret she wished to discover, she had found at last a countenance so perfectly impassible, that no insight followed her investigation.

The officer who stood before her, and silently studied her with so much care, might be about twenty-six years of age. He had a very fair complexion, with blue eyes, rather deeply set. His fine and clear-cut mouth continued perfectly motionless in its classic lines. His well-developed chin denoted that strength of will which, in the prevailing English character, is commonly no better than obstinacy, and his slightly receding forehead—such as is accorded to poets, to enthusiasts and to soldiers—was scantily shaded by short thin hair, which, as well as the beard that covered the lower part of his face, was of a deep chestnut color.

When they entered the harbor it was already dark. The fog increased the obscurity, and formed around the lanterns of the ships and jetties a circle similar to that which surrounds the moon when it threatens rainy weather. The air was melancholy, damp, and cold.

Her ladyship, firm as she was, felt herself shivering, in spite of all her efforts.

The officer had had all of her ladyship's packages pointed out to him, and ordered them to be put into the boat; after which, offering his hand to assist her, he requested her to descend herself.

Her ladyship looked at the man, and hesitated.

"Who are you, sir," said she, "who are so good as to trouble yourself so particularly about me?"

"You may see, madame, from my uniform, that I am an officer in the English navy," replied the young man.

"But is it usual for the officers of the English navy to put themselves at the command of their countrywomen, when they approach a British port, and to display their gallantry so far as to conduct them on shore?"

"Yes, my lady, it is the custom—not from gallantry, but prudence—that, in time of war, strangers must be conducted to a certain appointed hotel, in order that they may, until every information be obtained concerning them, remain under the inspection of the government."

These words were uttered with the most exact politeness, and the most perfect calmness, and yet they did not convince her ladyship.

"But I am not a foreigner, sir," said she, in an accent as pure as was ever uttered between Portsmouth and Manchester. "My name is Lady Clarick, and this proceeding—"

"This proceeding is general, my lady, and you will in vain endeavor to escape it."

"I will follow you, then, sir."

And accepting the officer's hand, she began to descend the ladder, at the bottom of which the boat was waiting. The officer followed her. A large cloak was spread in the stern: the officer made her seat herself on it, and placed himself at her side.

"Give way!" said he to the sailors.

The eight oars all fell into the water at the same instant, and the boat seemed to fly along the surface of the sea. In five minutes they reached the shore. The officer sprang upon the quay, and gave his hand to her ladyship. A carriage was waiting for them.

"Is this carriage for us?" demanded the lady.

"Yes, madame," replied the officer.

"Then the hotel is at some distance?"

"At the other end of the town."

"Let us go," said her ladyship.

She then entered the carriage with a resolute step.

Having superintended the safe packing of the baggage, the officer took his place beside her ladyship, and closed the carriage door.

Then, without any orders being given to him, or any indication where he was to go, the coachman set off at a gallop, and was soon threading the streets of the town.

So strange a reception naturally supplied her ladyship with abundant matter for reflection. And, seeing that the young officer did not appear at all inclined to enter into conversation, she leant back in one of the corners of the carriage, and reviewed through her mind one after the other, all the suppositions which came to her.

But, in about a quarter of an hour, surprised at the length of their journey, she looked out of the window to observe where they were going. She could no longer see any houses ; but trees were visible in the darkness, like vast black phantoms, chasing one another.

My Lady shuddered.

" But we have left the town, sir," said she.

The young officer remained silent.

" I positively declare, sir, that I will go no further if you do not tell me whither you are conveying me."

This threat produced no reply.

" Ah ! it is too much !" exclaimed her ladyship. " Help, help ! "

No voice responded to her cries. The carriage continued its rapid course. The officer seemed to be a statue.

Her ladyship gazed on the officer with one of those terrible glances which were peculiar to her own face, and which so rarely failed of their effect. Passion made her eyes positively sparkle in the gloom, but the young man continued perfectly immovable.

She then attempted to open the door and throw herself out.

" Take care, madame," coldly observed the young man ; " you will kill yourself if you leap out."

The lady resumed her seat, foaming with rage. The officer leant forward, looked at her in his turn, and seemed surprised to find a countenance, before so beautiful, now so convulsed with rage as to have become almost hideous. The crafty creature, comprehending that she should sacrifice her own interests by thus betraying her true nature, at once composed her features, and in a beseeching voice, said :

“ For heaven’s sake, sir, tell me if it be to yourself, or to your government, or to an enemy, that I am to impute this violence that is inflicted on me ? ”

“ No violence is inflicted, madame; and that which has befallen you is the result of a very simple measure, which we are forced to pursue towards all those who land in England.”

“ Then you do not know me, sir ? ”

“ It is the first time that I have had the honor of seeing you.”

“ And, upon your honor, you have no cause of enmity against me ? ”

“ None whatever, I swear ! ”

There was so much calmness, so much serenity, so much gentleness in the young man’s voice, that her ladyship was reassured.

At last, after about an hour’s journey, the carriage stopped at an iron gate, at the entrance of a narrow road, which led to a gloomy-looking, massive, and isolated castle. And, as the carriage-wheels rolled over a soft gravel, her ladyship heard a mighty roaring, which she recognized as the sound of the sea breaking upon a rocky coast.

The carriage passed under two arches, and stopped at last in a square and gloomy courtyard. The door was almost immediately opened, the young officer leaped lightly out, presented his hand to her ladyship, who leaned upon it, and got out, in her turn, with great calmness.

"So, I am a prisoner," said she, looking around, and then fixing her eyes on the young man with the most gracious smile imaginable. "But it will not be for long I am certain," added she. "My own conscience and your politeness give me that assurance, sir."

Flattering as the compliment might be, the officer made no reply, but drawing from his pocket a small silver whistle, like those used by boatswains on board of men-of-war, he sounded it three times, in three different modulations. Several men immediately appeared; they unharnessed the horses, and took the carriage into a coach-house.

The officer, still preserving the same calm politeness, invited his prisoner to enter the castle. The latter with the same smile upon her countenance, took his arm, and passed with him under a low arched doorway, which led them through a vault lighted only at the end, to a stone staircase, winding round a pillar of the same material. They then stopped before a massive door, which, upon the application of a key that the young man carried, slowly swung upon its hinges, and opened into the apartment intended for her ladyship.

With one glance, the prisoner scanned the minutest particulars of this room. It was a chamber, the furniture of which was at the same time very suitable for a prison, and very severe for the habitation of the free. But the bars to the windows, and the locks outside the doors, decided the question in favor of the prison. For an instant this creature, although hardened from the most vigorous sources, lost all her strength of mind. She sank into a seat, folded her arms, drooped her head, and waited in momentary expectation of seeing a judge enter to examine her.

But no one came except two or three marines, who brought in her baggage, and having deposited it in a corner, withdrew without uttering a word.

The officer presided over all these details with the same calmness which her ladyship had invariably observed, not speaking a syllable, and enforcing obedience merely by a gesture of his hand, or a note from his whistle. One would have said that between this man and his inferiors, vocal language either had never existed, or had become unnecessary.

Her ladyship could at last no longer restrain herself, and she thus broke the silence :

“ In heaven’s name, sir,” she exclaimed, “ what does all this mean ? Resolve my perplexity : I have courage to face any danger which I can see coming, any misfortune which I understand. Where am I, and why am I here ? Am I free ? Wherefore these bars and doors ? Am I a prisoner ? What crime have I committed ? ”

“ You are here, madame, in the apartment destined for you. I was ordered to go and arrest you at sea, and to conduct you to this castle. I have accomplished that order, I believe with the rigid exactness of an officer, but, at the same time, with the courtesy of a gentleman. There terminates, at least, for the present, the charge with which I have been intrusted concerning you. The remainder devolves upon another person.”

“ And this other person—who is he ? ” demanded her ladyship : “ can you not tell me his name ? ”

As she spoke, the clashing of spurs was heard upon the staircase : some voices passed by, and were lost in the distance, and the sound of a solitary step approached the door.

“ That person is now here, madame,” said the officer, standing on one side, and assuming an attitude of submission and respect.

At the same instant the door opened, and a man appeared upon the threshold. He was without hat, carried

a sword at his side, and was rumpling a handkerchief between his fingers.

Her ladyship thought that she recognized this shadow in the gloom; and supporting herself with one hand on the arm of the chair she bent forward her head, in order, as it were, to meet a certainty.

The stranger slowly approached, and as he advanced and gradually came within range of the light emitted by the lamp, her ladyship involuntarily recoiled. And then, when she had no longer any doubt—

“What! my brother,” she exclaimed, overwhelmed with astonishment, “is it you?”

“Yes, fair lady,” replied Lord de Winter, making her a bow, half courteous and half ironical, “myself.”

“But then, this castle—”

“Is mine.”

“This apartment—”

“Is yours.”

“Then I am your prisoner?”

“Or something very like it.”

“But it is a frightful abuse of power.”

“No hard words, madame; let us sit down and have some quiet talk, as is suitable between brother and sister.”

Then, turning toward the door, and perceiving that the young officer awaited his final orders:

“It is all right,” said he, “I thank you. Now leave us, Mr. Felton.”

CHAPTER L.

A CHAT BETWEEN A BROTHER AND SISTER.

DURING the time which Lord de Winter occupied in shutting and bolting the door, and moving a seat beside the easy-chair of his sister-in-law, her ladyship was thoughtfully directing her glance into the depths of possibility, and discovering the whole of that plot, of which she could form no conception, so long as she continued ignorant of the person into whose hands she had unhappily fallen. She knew her brother-in-law to be a true gentleman, fond of the chase, playing freely, and gallant with regard to women, but of powers below the average with respect to intrigues. How had he been able to know of her arrival and to have her arrested ; and why did he desire to retain her ?”

Athos had said a few words, which proved that her conversation with the cardinal had been heard by other ears ; but she could not imagine that he could so promptly and so boldly have dug a countermine. She rather feared that her former proceedings in England had been discovered. Buckingham might have guessed that it was she who had cut off his diamond studs, and have sought to avenge himself for that petty treachery. But Buckingham was incapable of any extremities against a woman, especially if that woman was supposed to have been actuated by a sentiment of jealousy.

This supposition appeared the most probable ; she thought that they wished to revenge the past, and not to anticipate the future.

However, she congratulated herself on having fallen

into the hands of her brother-in-law, whom she hoped easily to manage, rather than into those of a direct enemy.

“ Yes, brother, let us have a talk,” she said, with a sort of sprightliness, determined as she was to draw from this conversation, in spite of all the dissimulation which Lord de Winter might bring to it, such information as she needed to regulate her future conduct.

“ You have made up your mind, then, to return to England,” said Lord de Winter, “ in spite of the determination you so often expressed to me, in Paris, never again to set your foot upon the territory of Great Britain !”

Her ladyship replied to this question by another :

“ First, tell me,” said she, “ how you could manage to have me watched so closely, as not only to know beforehand that I was coming, but also the day, the hour, and the port where I should land ?”

Lord de Winter adopted the same tactics as her ladyship, thinking that, as his sister-in-law employed them, they were undoubtedly the best.

“ But tell me yourself, my dear sister, for what purpose you are come to England ?”

“ Why, I have come to see you,” replied the lady, ignorant how much she aggravated by this answer the suspicions which D’Artagnan’s letter had excited in her brother-in-law’s mind and only wishing to captivate the kindness of her auditor by a lie.

“ Oh ! to see me !” said Lord de Winter, sneeringly.

“ Assuredly, to see you. What is there surprising in that ?”

“ And you had no other motive in coming to England but to see me ?”

“ No.”

“ Then it is for my sake alone that you have given yourself the trouble to cross the channel.”

"For you alone."

"I'faith, your tenderness is excessive, my dear sister."

"But am I not your nearest relative?" demanded the lady, in a tone of the most touching simplicity.

"And also my sole heiress, are you not?" said Lord de Winter in turn, fixing his eyes upon those of her ladyship—"that is to say, through your son."

Great as was her power of self-command, her ladyship could not refrain from starting; and as, in uttering these last words, Lord de Winter had laid his hand upon his sister's arm, this start had not escaped him.

In truth, the blow was both direct and deep. The first idea in the lady's mind was, that Kitty had betrayed her, and had disclosed to the baron that interested aversion of which she had imprudently permitted the manifestations to escape her before her maid; and she also recollects the furious and impolitic attack which she had made on D'Artagnan, after he had saved her brother-in-law's life.

"I do not understand what you mean, my lord," said she, wishing to gain time, and to make her adversary talk; "is there some hidden meaning in your words?"

"Oh no," said Lord de Winter, with apparent good-humor; "you wish to see me, and you come to England. I am informed of this wish, or rather I suspect that you feel it, and, to spare you all the inconvenience attending a nocturnal arrival in the harbor, and all the fatigues of a landing, I send one of my officers to meet you. I put a carriage at your command, and he brings you here to this castle, of which I am the governor, where I am every day, and where, to satisfy our mutual desire of seeing each other, I have had an apartment prepared for your reception. What is there in all this more surprising than in what you have told me?"

"No; but what surprises me, is, that you should have received previous intelligence of my arrival."

"And yet it is the simplest thing in the world, my dear sister. Did you not observe, that, on entering the Roads, the captain of your little vessel sent forward his log-book, and the register of his passengers and crew, that he might obtain permission to enter the port? I am the governor of the harbor; this book was brought to me and I recognized your name. My heart told me what your speech has just confirmed; that is to say, your motive for thus braving the dangers of a voyage so perilous, or, at any rate, so fatiguing, at this season; and I sent out my cutter to escort you. You know what followed."

Her ladyship was satisfied that his lordship lied, and she was only the more alarmed.

"Brother," said she, "was not that the Duke of Buckingham whom I saw on the jetty as I landed?"

"Himself," replied Lord de Winter. "Oh! I can well imagine that the sight of him would strike you. You came from a country where they must think a good deal about him; and I know that his armaments against France engage much of the attention of your friend, the cardinal!"

"My friend, the cardinal!" exclaimed the lady, perceiving that on this point, also as on the other, Lord de Winter seemed to be equally well-informed.

"Is he not your friend, then?" carelessly inquired the baron. "Oh! pardon me; I thought he was. But we will talk of his grace hereafter. Let us not abandon the sentimental turn which the conversation had taken. You came, you say, to see me?"

"Yes."

"Well, I have told you that your wish shall be gratified, and that we shall see each other every day."

"Must I then remain here forever?" demanded the lady, with some degree of dread.

"Do you find yourself badly lodged here, my dear

sister? Ask for what you want, and I will hasten to provide it."

"But I have neither my own women, nor my servants, with me here."

"You shall have everything you want of that kind. Only tell me what kind of establishment your first husband kept for you, and, although I am but your brother-in-law, I shall arrange your present home upon a similar footing."

"My first husband!" exclaimed the lady, looking at Lord de Winter, with wildness in her eyes.

"Yes, your French husband—I do not mean my own brother. But, if you have forgotten it, as he is still alive, I can write to him, and he will send me the necessary information on the subject."

Cold drops rolled down her ladyship's forehead.

"You are jesting," said she, in a hoarse voice.

"Do I look like it?" inquired the baron, rising, and retreating one step

"Or rather, you mean to insult me," continued she, convulsively grasping the arms of her chair, and raising herself by that means.

"I insult you," said Lord de Winter, contemptuously: "and do you really think that possible, madame?"

"Sir," said her ladyship, "you are either drunk or mad. Leave me, and send me a woman."

"Women are very indiscreet, my dear sister. Cannot I serve you as a waiting-maid? And thus all our secrets will remain in the family."

"Insolent fellow!" exclaimed her ladyship. Then, as if moved by a spring, she bounded toward the baron, who awaited her with calmness, yet with a hand upon the hilt of his sword.

"Ah, ah!" said he, "I know that you have a habit of

assassinating people; but I will defend myself, I warn you, even against you."

"Ah! you are right," said the lady, "and you look to me like one who is coward enough to raise his hand against a woman!"

"And, if that were to happen, I should have an excuse. Besides, mine would not be the first man's hand that had been laid upon you, I imagine."

And the baron, by a slow accusing gesture, pointed to the lady's left shoulder, which he almost touched with his finger.

Her ladyship uttered a hoarse cry, and retreated to the further corner of the room, like a panther drawing back before its spring.

"Oh, roar as much as you please!" exclaimed Lord de Winter, "only do not try to bite; for, I warn you, that would only prove the worse for you. There are no lawyers here who regulate succession beforehand, there is no knight-errant, who will pick up a quarrel with me for the sake of the fair lady whom I keep imprisoned; but I have here judges, who will dispose of a woman, who, being already married, was shameless enough to intrude herself into the family of my elder brother, Lord de Winter: and these judges will hand you over to an executioner, who will make your two shoulders alike."

The eyes of her ladyship shot forth such lightning glances, that although he was an armed man, before an unarmed woman, he felt the chill of fear penetrating to his very soul. Nevertheless, he continued, but with increasing fury:

"Yes, I understand: after having inherited my brother's property you would like to inherit mine also; but, be assured beforehand, though you may be able to assassinate me, or to get me assassinated, my precautions are already taken—not one penny of what I possess

shall come either into your hands or into those of your son. Are you not already wealthy enough in the enjoyment of nearly half a million, and could you not pause in your fatal course, if you do not really do wickedness from an unbounded and intense love of it? Oh, I swear to you if my brother's memory were not still sacred to me, you should be sent to rot in some dungeon of the state, or to satiate the curiosity of the mob at Tyburn! I shall, however, be silent; but you must learn to endure your confinement in tranquillity. In a fortnight or three weeks I shall set out with the army for La Rochelle; on the evening before my departure, you will be sent on board a vessel, which I shall see set sail, and which will convey you to one of our southern colonies; and you may rely upon it that I shall put you in charge of a companion who will blow out your brains on the first attempt that you may make to return to England, or to the Continent."

Her ladyship listened with an attention that expanded the pupils of her burning eyes.

"Yes," continued Lord de Winter, "but at present you will continue in this castle: the walls are thick, the doors are strong, the bars are solid; and besides, your window looks directly down into the sea. My ship's company, who are devoted to me in life and death, keep guard around this chamber, and command every passage that conducts into the courtyard; and even there, you will find three iron-grated doors to pass through which the watch-word is requisite; the orders are precise—a step, a motion, or a word on your part which bears the semblance of an intention to escape, will draw their fire upon you. If you should be killed, English justice ought, I think, to be grateful to me for having spared her some trouble. Ah! your features have assumed their calmness, and your countenance regains its confidence. 'Ten

days or a fortnight,' you say to yourself—' Bah ! by that time some idea will suggest itself to my inventive mind, I have an infernal disposition, and shall find some victim. Within a fortnight from this time, I shall have escaped from here'—Try your fortune ! ”.

Finding her thoughts thus plainly read, her ladyship dug her nails into her flesh, that she might deprive her face of every expression save that of agony.

Lord de Winter continued :

“ As to the officer who is in command here during my absence, you have seen him ; therefore you already know him. You are aware that he can keep to his instructions ; for you did not travel from Portsmouth without trying to make him talk. What think you of him ? Could a marble statue be more passionless or mute ? You have already tried the power of your seductions over many men, and, unfortunately, you have always succeeded ; but try them now on this man, and, by Jove ! if you succeed, I shall believe you to be the very fiend himself.”

He went toward the door and opened it suddenly.

“ Call Mr. Felton,” said he. “ Wait a moment, madame, and I shall recommend you to his care.”

During the strange silence which then reigned between them, the sound of a slow and regular step was heard approaching. In the shadow of the corridor a human form was soon apparent, and the young lieutenant, with whom we have already been made acquainted, stood at the door, awaiting the baron’s orders.

“ Come in, my dear John,” said Lord de Winter, “ come in and shut the door.”

The young officer entered the room.

“ Now,” said the baron, “ look at this woman. She is young and beautiful ; she has every earthly fascination ; but she is a monster, who, at twenty-five years of age, has committed as many crimes as you could read off in a year

in the archives of our tribunals. Her voice prepossesses you in her favor; her beauty entrails her victims; and in justice to her be it said that her body pays what she has promised. She will attempt to seduce you—perhaps to kill you. I have rescued you from misery, Felton; I have had you made lieutenant; I have once saved your life—you remember on what occasion; I am not only your protector, but your friend—not only your benefactor, but your father. This woman has come to England to plot against my life. I hold the serpent in my power. Well, I call you here, and I say to you—‘ My dear Felton—John, my son—defer me, and guard yourself especially, from this woman. Swear that you will preserve her for the punishment she deserves? John Felton, I trust your word—John Felton, I confide in your honor.’ ”

“ My lord,” answered the young officer, exhibiting on his open face all the hatred he could find in his heart, “ I swear to you that everything shall be done as you desire.”

Her ladyship received this look like a resigned victim. It was impossible to see a softer or more submissive expression than that which then reigned over her beautiful face. Scarcely could Lord de Winter himself recognize the tigress which he had the instant before almost prepared to fight.

“ She must never leave this room—do you hear, John ? ” continued the baron; “ she must have no communication with any one; she must speak to no one but yourself, if, indeed, you will do her the honor to talk to her.”

“ It is quite enough, my lord—I have sworn ! ”

“ And now, madame,” said the baron, “ endeavor to make your peace with God, for you have been judged by men.”

Her ladyship let her head droop, as if she felt actually crushed by this sentence. Lord de Winter left the room,

making a sign to Felton, who followed him, and closed the door.

Directly afterward was heard in the passage the heavy tread of a marine, who was keeping guard, with his ax at his belt, and his musket in his hand.

Her ladyship remained for a few minutes in the same position, for she fancied that they might be watching her through the key-hole. Then she slowly raised her head, which had resumed a formidable expression of threat and defiance ; ran to the door and listened ; looked out of the window ; and returned to bury herself in an immense easy-chair, and abandon herself to anxious thought.

CHAPTER LI.

THE OFFICE.

In the meantime, the cardinal was expecting news from England : but as no news arrived, excepting such as was vexatious and alarming, La Rochelle was formally invested. However certain success appeared—thanks to the precautions which had been taken, and more especially to the causeway, which no longer permitted any vessel to approach the besieged town—the blockade might yet continue a long time ; and it was a great affront to the arms of the king, and a great annoyance to the cardinal, who had no longer, it is true, to embroil Louis XIII. with Anne of Austria, for that had been accomplished, but to reconcile M. de Bassompierre, who had quarreled with the Duke of Angouleme.

As to monsieur, who had begun the siege, he left the task of finishing it to the cardinal.

The town, in spite of the incredible persistence of its mayor, had attempted a sort of mutiny to surrender. But the mayor had sent the mutineers to be hung. This execution subdued the most unruly, who were thereby determined to submit, in preference, to death from starvation, as the latter mode of dying appeared to them less certain and more slow than that by strangulation.

The besiegers, on their side, occasionally captured some of the messengers whom the Rochellais dispatched to Buckingham, or the spies whom Buckingham had sent to the Rochellais. In both cases, the captives were subjected to a summary process. The cardinal pronounced the single word—"Hang!" His majesty was invited to the

execution. The king came languidly, and chose a good place for observing all the details of the operation. This amused him for a time, and gave him a little patience with the siege ; but it did not prevent him from becoming heartily weary, or from talking incessantly of returning to Paris ; so that, if the messengers or spies had fallen short, his eminence, in spite of all his fertility of imagination, would have found himself in very considerable embarrassment.

Nevertheless, the time passed away, and still the Rochellais did not surrender. The last spy who had been taken was the bearer of a letter, which informed Buckingham that the town was at the last extremity ; but instead of adding—"if your assistance should not arrive before a fortnight, we must surrender," it merely said—"if your assistance should not arrive before a fortnight, we shall all be dead from hunger when it comes."

The Rochellais, therefore, had no hope but in Buckingham—Buckingham was their Messiah. It was manifest that, if they should receive indubitable information that no further dependence was to be placed on Buckingham, their courage would forsake them, with their hopes.

The cardinal, on this account, waited with extreme impatience for intelligence from England, which might announce to him that Buckingham would not arrive.

The question of taking the town by assault, which had been often debated in the king's council, had been always dismissed. In the first instance, La Rochelle appeared to be impregnable ; and then the cardinal, whatever he might himself have said about it, was well aware that the horror of the blood which would have been shed in such an encounter—where Frenchmen fought against Frenchmen—would have been a retrogradation of sixty years imprinted on his policy ; and the cardinal was, at that epoch, what we now call a man of progress. In fact, the sack of

La Rochelle, and the slaughter of three or four thousand Huguenots who would have perished, would have had, in 1628, too great a resemblance to the massacre of St. Bartholomew, in 1572. Finally, in addition to all this, this extreme measure, to which his majesty, like a good Catholic, had no repugnance, always broke down before this argument of the besieging generals : " La Rochelle is impregnable except by famine."

The cardinal was unable to dismiss from his own mind the fear which he entertained of his terrible emissary, for he had also understood the strange characteristics of that woman, who was, at the same time, half lioness and half serpent. Had she betrayed him ? Or was she dead ? He knew her well enough, in any case, to be assured that, whether she was acting for him or against him, whether enemy or friend, she could not remain inactive without very powerful obstructions. But whence could these obstructions arise ? This was what he was unable to divine.

After all, however, he had with good reason much confidence in her ladyship. He had suspected, in her past career, circumstances so terrible, that his own red mantle was required to conceal them : and he felt that, from some cause or other, this woman was his own, because from him alone she could obtain support more potent than the danger which pursued her.

The cardinal resolved, therefore, to carry on the war alone, and to expect foreign aid only as one may expect the coincidence of a fortunate chance. He continued the construction of that famous causeway which was to carry famine into La Rochelle : and in the meantime, he cast his eyes over that unhappy city, which contained so much profound misery, and so many heroic virtues, recalling to his mind the expression of Louis XI., who had been his own political predecessor as he was the predecessor of

Robespierre, and adopting this maxim of the companion of Tristan—"Divide to govern."

When Henry IV. besieged Paris, he had thrown over the walls bread and other edibles. The cardinal threw over brief addresses, in which he represented to the Rochellais how unjust and self-willed, and barbarous, had been the conduct of their chiefs, who possessed abundance of wheat, yet did not distribute it; and who adopted as a maxim—for they also had their maxims—that the death of women, of old men, and of children, was a thing of little moment, so that the men who were to defend the walls continued vigorous and well. Until then, either from devotedness or from inability to contend against it, this maxim had, without being generally adopted, passed from theory into practice: but these addresses successfully assailed it. They reminded the men that these women, children, and old men, who were allowed to die of hunger, were their wives, their offspring, and their sires; and that it would be more just if all were alike subjected to the common wretchedness, so that a similarity of position might give occasion for unanimity of resolution.

These addresses produced all the effect expected by him who had written them in determining a great number of inhabitants to open secret negotiations with the royal army.

But, at the very moment when his eminence saw his measure beginning to bear fruit, and was congratulating himself on having adopted it, an inhabitant of Rochelle who had arrived from Portsmouth, managed to pass through the royal lines, God knows how—so complete was the triple watchfulness of Bassompierre, of Schomberg, and the Duke of Angouleme, themselves overlooked by the cardinal, and announced that he had seen a splendid fleet, ready to set sail before another week. Buckingham, moreover, declared to the mayor that the great

league against France was at last about to be proclaimed, and that the kingdom would be speedily invaded at the same time by the armies of England, Spain, and the empire. This letter was publicly read in all parts of the town, copies of it were posted at the corners of the streets, and those even, who had attempted to commence negotiations interrupted them, being resolved to wait for the succor which was so soon to reach them.

This unexpected circumstance renewed all the original anxieties of Richelieu, and compelled him to turn his eyes once more across the sea.

During all this time the royal army, free from the cares weighing upon its only true commander, led a most joyous life, for provisions were not scarce in the camp, nor money either. The regiments were all at rivalry in gayety and audacity. To take spies and hang them, to undertake daring expeditions on the causeway or the sea, to imagine follies and to execute them calmly: such were the pastimes which made those days seem short to the army, which were so long, not only for the Rochellais, who were worried by famine and anxieties, but for the cardinal, who blockaded them so vigorously.

Sometimes when the cardinal, who was always riding about like the humblest soldier of the army, directed his thoughtful eyes over the works which advanced so slowly in comparison to his desire, although constructed by engineers whom he had collected from the remotest corners of France, if he met with a musketeer of M. de Treville's company, he approached him, and looked at him in a singular way; and then, not recognizing him as one of our four companions, he transferred to other objects his penetrating glance, and his capacious thoughts.

One day, when consumed by a mortal lassitude of mind, without hopes of treating with the Rochellais, and without intelligence from England, the cardinal went

forth, with no other aim but that of going out, and only accompanied by Cahusac and La Houdiniere, wandering along the sands, and mingling the immensity of his own dreams with the immensity of the ocean, he came at a gentle pace to a small hill, from the top of which he perceived behind a hedge, reclining on the grass, and protected from the sun by a group of trees, seven men, surrounded by empty bottles. Four of these men were our musketeers, getting ready to listen to the reading of a letter which one of them had just received. This letter was so important that it had made them forsake some cards and dice which they had left upon a drum.

The three others were the valets of the gentlemen, and were at that moment engaged in opening an enormous demijohn of Collioure wine.

The cardinal, as we have said, was in a gloomy mood, and when he was in this state of mind, nothing so much increased his sullenness as the gayety of others.

He had, besides a singular habit of always supposing that the circumstances which caused his sadness were those which excited the gayety of strangers. Making a sign to Cahusac and La Houdiniere to halt, he got off his horse, and approached these suspicious laughers, hoping that by the aid of the sand, which deadened the sound of his steps, and the hedge which concealed his person, he might hear some words of a conversation which appeared so interesting. At ten paces from the hedge he recognized the Gascon dialect of D'Artagnan, and as he had already seen that the men were musketeers, he did not doubt that the three others were those who were called the inseparables—that is to say, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis.

It may be imagined that this discovery increased his desire to hear the conversation. His eyes assumed a strange expression, and with the stealthy pace of a tiger-

cat, he approached the hedge, but he had been only able to catch a few vague syllables, having no definite meaning, when a sonorous and short exclamation made him start, and attracted the attention of the musketeers.

“Officer!” called out Grimaud.

“You are speaking, I think, rascal,” said Athos, raising himself on one elbow and fascinating Grimaud with his sparkling eye.

Grimaud, therefore, did not add one word, contenting himself with pointing with his finger toward the hedge, and indicating by this gesture the cardinal and his escort.

With one bound the four musketeers were on their feet and bowed respectfully.

The cardinal appeared furious.

“It seems that the gentlemen of the musketeers have themselves guarded,” said he. “Is it because the English come by land, or do the musketeers consider themselves as superior officers?”

“My lord,” replied Athos—for, in the midst of the general confusion, he alone had preserved that coolness and calmness of the nobleman which had never failed him—“my lord, the musketeers, when their duty is ended, or when they are not on duty, play and drink, and are very superior officers to their own servants.”

“Their servants!” growled the cardinal; “servants who have a watchword to warn you when any one approaches. They are not servants—they are sentinels.”

“Your eminence may, however, perceive, that had we not taken this precaution, we should have run the hazard of permitting you to pass without paying our respects, and without offering our thanks to you for uniting D’Artagnan and us,” continued Athos. “You, D’Artagnan, who were but now wishing for an opportunity of expressing your gratitude to his eminence, here is one given to you: take advantage of it.”

These words were uttered with that imperturbable coolness which distinguished Athos in times of danger, and with that excessive courtesy which made him, on certain occasions, a king more dignified than kings by birth.

D'Artagnan came forward, and stammered out some words of thanks, which quickly died away before the severe looks of the cardinal.

"It does not signify, gentleman," continued the cardinal, without appearing in the slightest degree turned from his first intention by the incident which Athos had suggested; "it does not signify. I do not like to see simple soldiers, because they have the advantage of serving in a privileged regiment, playing the great men. Discipline is the same for all."

Athos allowed the cardinal to finish this sentence, and, bowing assent, thus replied:

"Discipline, my lord, has been, I hope, in no degree forgotten by us. We are not on duty; and we believe that, not being on duty, we might dispose of our time precisely as we pleased. If it should fortunately happen that your eminence has some special orders to give us, we are ready to obey them. Your lordship perceives," continued Athos, frowning, for this species of interrogatory began to irritate him, "that, to be ready at the least alarm, we have brought with us all our arms."

He pointed with his finger to the four muskets piled together near the drum which bore the cards and dice.

"Your eminence may believe," added D'Artagnan, "that we should have come to meet you if we could have supposed that it was you who approached us with so small a retinue."

The cardinal bit his mustaches, and even his lips.

"Do you know what you look like—always together as you now are, armed as you are, and guarded by your

valets?" said the cardinal. " You look like four conspirators."

" Oh ! as for that, my lord," said Athos, " it is true ; and we do conspire, as your eminence might have seen the other morning—only it is against the Rochellais."

" Ah ! gentlemen politicians," replied the cardinal frowning in his turn, " the secret of many things might be found in your brains, if one could read in them, as you were reading in that letter which you concealed the moment that you saw me coming."

The color flew into the face of Athos, and he made one step towards his eminence.

" It might be thought that you really do suspect us, my lord, and that we are undergoing a real examination. If that be the case, would your eminence deign to explain himself, and we should at least know what we are to expect."

" And if it was an examination," replied the cardinal, " others besides you have been subjected to it, M. Athos, and have answered."

" And therefore, my lord, have I said, that your eminence has only to question, and that we are ready to reply."

" What letter was that you were reading, M. Aramis, and which you concealed ? "

" A letter from a woman, my lord."

" Oh, I understand," said the cardinal ; " discretion is necessary as to epistles of that kind ; but nevertheless they may be shown to a confessor, and you know I am in orders."

" My lord," said Athos, with a calmness all the more fearful that he was staking his head on his answer : " my lord, the letter is from a woman, but it is not signed either by Marion Delorme, or Madame de Courbalet, nor by Madame de Chaulnes."

The cardinal became as pale as death. A savage flash shot from his eyes. He turned round as if to give an order to Cahusac and La Houdiniere.

Athos saw the movement, and took a step toward the muskets, on which the eyes of his three friends were fixed, like men who were not inclined to allow themselves to be arrested. The cardinal was himself only the third man of his party. The musketeers, including their valets, were seven. He judged, also, that the game would be still more unequal, if Athos and his friends should really conspire; and, by one of those rapid changes which he always had at command, all his anger melted into a smile.

"Come, come," said he, "you are brave young men, proud in the sunshine, but faithful in the dark; and there is no great harm in keeping a good watch over yourselves, when you watch so well over others. Gentlemen, I have not forgotten the night when you served as my escort in going to the Red Dove-cote. If there were any danger to be feared on the road I am about to take, I would beg you to accompany me: but as there is none, remain where you are, and finish your wine, your game, and your letter. Adieu, gentlemen."

And again mounting his horse, which Cahusac had brought him, he saluted them with his hand, and went his way.

The four young men, erect and motionless, followed him with their eyes, but without uttering a word until he was out of sight. Then they looked at one another.

The countenances of all of them indicated consternation; for, in spite of the amicable adieu of his eminence, they well knew that the cardinal had gone away with rage in his heart.

Athos alone smiled a haughty and disdainful smile.

When the cardinal was out of reach of sound as well as sight:

"That Grimaud called out very late," said Porthos, who had a great desire to vent his ill-humor on some one.

Grimaud was about to answer by excusing himself when Athos raised his finger, and Grimaud remained silent.

"Would you have given up the letter, Aramis?" said D'Artagnan.

"I had decided," said Aramis, in the softest, most melodious voice, "if he had persisted in requiring the letter, that I would have presented it to him with one hand, and passed my sword through his body with the other."

"I expected as much," said Athos, "and for that reason I threw myself between you. Verily, that man is extremely imprudent to talk in such style to other men. One would imagine that he had never been engaged with any but women and children."

"My dear Athos," said D'Artagnan, "I admire you; but yet we were wrong, after all."

"How wrong?" said Athos. "Whose, then, is this air we breathe? Whose this ocean, over which our looks extend? Whose is this sand, on which we are resting? Whose is this letter from your mistress? Do all these belong to the cardinal? Upon my honor this man fancies that the world belongs to him. There were you, stammering, stupefied, and overwhelmed as though the Bastile stared you in the face, and the gigantic Medusa had transformed you into stone. Is it a conspiracy, I wonder, to be in love? You are in love with a woman whom the cardinal has chosen to confine; you wish to rescue her from his hands; it is a game which you are playing against his eminence. This letter is your hand. Why should you show your hand to your adversary? If he can guess it, very good. We shall easily guess his, you may be assured."

"In fact, Athos, what you now say is full of sense," replied D'Artagnan.

"In that case, let us not say another word about what has just occurred, and let Aramis resume his cousin's letter, where the cardinal interrupted him."

Aramis drew the letter from his pocket; the three friends drew near him; and the three valets again grouped themselves around the capacious demijohn.

"You had only read one or two lines," said D'Artagnan: "begin it over again at the very beginning."

"Willingly," replied Aramis.

"**M**Y DEAR COUSIN,—I really believe that I shall decide on going to Stenay, where my sister has made our little servant enter into a convent of the Carmelites. That poor child is quite resigned; she knows that she cannot live anywhere else, without endangering her salvation. Nevertheless, if our family affairs should be settled as we wish, I think that she will run the danger of perdition, and will return to those whom she regrets; more particularly, as she knows that they are always thinking of her. In the meantime, she is not very unhappy; all that she now desires is a letter from her intended. I know very well that these sort of articles have some difficulty in passing through the gratings; but after all, as I have proved to you, my dear cousin, I am not very unskillful, and I will undertake the commission. My sister thanks you for your good and enduring remembrance; she was for a short time in great anxiety, but she is at present more composed, having sent her agent down there, that nothing unexpected may happen.

"Adieu, my dear cousin. Let me hear from you as often as you can; that is to say, as often as you can do so safely. I embrace you.

"**MARIE MICHEON!**"

"Oh, what do I owe you, Aramis!" exclaimed D'Artagnan! "Dear Constance; I have at last some news of her. She lives—she is in safety in a convent—she is at Stenay! And where is Stenay, Athos?"

"On the frontiers of Alsace, in Lorraine: when once the siege is raised, we may take a turn there."

"And it will not be long, I hope," said Porthos, "for this morning they hung another spy, who declared that the Rochellais were now reduced to feed upon the leather of their shoes. Supposing that, after having eaten the leather, they should consume the sole, I do not exactly see what can remain for them afterward, unless they should take to eating one another."

"Poor fools!" said Athos, emptying a glass of excellent Bordeaux, which without possessing at that time the reputation that it now enjoys, did not the less deserve it—"poor fools! as if the Catholic faith were not the most profitable and the most agreeable of all religions. Yet never mind," added he, smacking his tongue against his palate, "they are brave fellows. But what the plague are you doing, Aramis?" continued Athos; "are you putting that letter into your pocket?"

"True," said D'Artagnan, "Athos is right: it must be burnt. And who knows, even then, but that the cardinal may have some secret for reading ashes?"

"He ought to have one," said Athos.

"But what will you do with the letter?" inquired Porthos.

"Come here, Grimaud," said Athos. "To punish you for having spoken without leave, my friend, you must eat this piece of paper; then, to reward you for the service which you will have rendered us you shall afterwards drink this glass of wine. Here is the letter first: chew it with energy."

Grimaud smiled, and with his eyes fixed on the glass,

which Athos filled to the very brim, he chewed away at the paper, and finally swallowed it.

“Bravo, Master Grimaud!” said Athos: “and now take this. Good! I will dispense with your saying thank you.”

Grimaud silently swallowed the glass of Bordeaux: and during the whole time that this pleasing operation lasted, his eyes, which were fixed upon the heavens, spoke a language, which, though mute, was not therefore the less expressive.

“And now,” said Athos, “unless the cardinal should form the ingenious idea of opening Grimaud’s stomach, I believe that we may be pretty easy.”

During this time, his eminence pursued his melancholy way, murmuring under his mustaches:

“Decidedly, these four men must belong to me!”

CHAPTER LII.

THE FIRST DAY OF IMPRISONMENT.

LET us now return to My Lady, of whom, a glance given to the coast of France has made us lose sight for an instant.

We shall again find her in the same desperate position in which we left her: digging for herself an abyss of dark reflections—a gloomy hell—at the gate of which she had almost left hope behind her; for the first time, she doubts; and, for the first time, she fears.

Twice has her fortune failed her; twice has she seen herself betrayed; and, on both these occasions, it was against that fatal talent, sent no doubt by Providence on purpose to oppose her, that she had been wrecked. D'Artagnan had conquered her: the invincible one in evil until then.

He had abused her in her love, humiliated her in her pride, thwarted her in her ambition: and now he was ruining her in her fortune, depriving her of her liberty, and menacing even her life. But, more than all, he had raised up a corner of her mask—of that ægis which had covered her, and rendered her so strong.

D'Artagnan had turned aside from Buckingham, whom she hated—as she did everything that she had once loved—the tempest with which Richelieu threatened him, in the person of the queen. D'Artagnan had personated De Wardes, for whom she had felt the caprice of a tigress, irresistible as the caprices of women of that character ever

are. D'Artagnan had discovered that terrible secret, which she had sworn that none should know, and not die. And lastly, at the very moment when she had obtained from Richelieu an instrument, by means of which she hoped to avenge herself on her enemy, that instrument is snatched from her hands, and it is D'Artagnan who holds her a prisoner, and who is going to transport her to some loathsome Botany Bay, some infamous Tyburn of the Indian Ocean.

For all this comes unquestionably from D'Artagnan. From whom except him, could so many disgraces be accumulated on her head? He alone could have transmitted to Lord de Winter all these frightful secrets, which he had himself discovered one after another by a kind of fatality. He knew her brother-in-law, and must have written to him.

How much of hatred she distills! There, motionless, with fixed and ardent eyes, seated in her solitary chamber, how well do the outbreaks of those stifled roarings, which escape at times from the excesses of her heart, accord with the sound of the breakers, which rise, bellow, moan, and dash like some eternal, impotent despair against the rocks on which that dark and haughty edifice is built! How, by the light of those flashes which her furious anger casts across her mind, does she conceive against Madame Bonancieux, against Buckingham, but most of all against D'Artagnan, projects of magnificent revenge, lost in the distant future!

Yes, but to avenge herself, she must be free: and for the prisoner to get free, there is a wall to pierce, bars to loosen, boards to break through; and these are enterprises which the patience and strength of man may accomplish, but before which the feverish irritation of a woman must infallibly be exercised in vain. Besides, for all these labors time is needed—months, or perhaps years—and she

has ten or twelve days, according to the declaration of Lord de Winter, her fraternal yet most fearful jailer.

And yet if she were a man, she would attempt all this, and might perchance succeed. Why, then, has Heaven committed the mistake of enshrining so strong a soul within a form so frail and delicate ?

Thus were the first moments of her captivity terrible : convulsions of rage, which she was impotent to restrain, paid to nature the tribute of her feminine weakness. But, by degrees, she overcame these ebullitions of frenzied anger ; the nervous trembling which had agitated her frame subsided ; and she at length fell back upon her own strength, like a tired serpent taking its repose.

"Come come, I was a fool to be so violent," said she, as she looked at the reflection of her burning glance in the glass in which she seemed to question herself. "No violence ! Violence is a proof of weakness. Besides, I have never succeeded by that means. Perhaps, if I used my strength against women, I might chance to find them more feeble than myself ; and, consequently, might vanquish them ; but it is against men that I struggle, and I am only a woman to them. Let me struggle like a woman. My strength is in my weakness."

Then, as if to satisfy herself of the change to which she could submit her most flexible and expressive features, she made them successively assume all expressions, from that of anger, which contracted every muscle, to that of the softest, most affectionate, and most seductive smile. Then, under her artistic hands, her hair was made to adopt every undulation which might add to the varied attractions of her charming face. At last, in self-complacency, she murmured :

"Well, there is nothing lost. I am still beautiful."

It was nearly eight o'clock in the evening. Her ladyship perceived a bed, and she thought that a few hours of

repose would not only refresh her head, but her complexion also. Yet before she lay down, a still better idea suggested itself. She had heard something said about supper. She had already been above an hour in the room; they could not tarry long before they brought her meal. The prisoner did not wish to lose any time, and resolved even this very evening, to make some attempt to feel her way, by studying the characters of those to whom her guardianship had been confided.

A light appeared beneath the door, and this announced the return of her jailers. Her ladyship, who had risen up, threw herself hastily into the chair, with her head thrown back, her beautiful hair, loose and disheveled, her breast half-naked under the rumpled lace, and one hand on her heart, and the other hanging down.

The bolts were drawn; the door grated on its hinges, steps were heard in the chamber, and approached her.

"Place the table there," said a voice, which the prisoner recognized as that of Felton.

The order was obeyed.

"You will bring lights, and relieve the guard," continued Felton: and this double order, which the young lieutenant gave to the same individuals, proved to the lady that her attendants and her guards were the same men—that is to say, soldiers.

The commands of Felton were executed with a silent rapidity, which gave a good idea of the flourishing condition of the discipline that he maintained.

At last Felton, who had not yet looked at her ladyship, turned toward her.

"Ah! ah!" said he, "she sleeps; very well, when she awakes she will sup."

And he took a few steps toward the door.

"But, lieutenant," said a soldier, who was less stoical

than his officer, and who had approached her ladyship, “that woman is not asleep.”

“What! not asleep!” said Felton. “What is she about, then?”

“She has fainted. Her face is very pale, and I can scarcely hear her breathing.”

“You are right,” said Felton, after he had looked at her ladyship from the place where he stood, without taking a single step toward her; “go and tell Lord de Winter that his prisoner has fainted; for I do not know what to do, the circumstance not having been foreseen.”

The soldier left the room to execute his officer’s commands. Felton seated himself in a chair, which happened to be near the door, and waited without uttering a word or making the least movement. Her ladyship was mistress of that great art, so studied by women, of seeing everything through her long eyelashes without seeming to open her eyes, and she perceived Felton, who had turned his back toward her. She continued watching him for about ten minutes, and during these ten minutes he did not once look round.

It then occurred to her that Lord de Winter would soon arrive, and by his presence, give new power to her jailer. Her first experiment had failed: and she bore it like a woman who had confidence in her own resources. She therefore raised her head, opened her eyes, and sighed feebly.

At this sigh, Felton at length turned round.

“Ah! you are awake at last, madame,” said he, “so I have nothing more to do here. If you require anything you will call.”

“Oh, my God! my God! what have I suffered!” murmured her ladyship, in that harmonious voice, which, like that of the enchantress of old, fascinated all whom she desired to destroy.

She raised herself in her chair, and assumed an attitude more graceful and alluring than that which she had borne during the time she was reclining.

Felton arose.

"You will be waited upon in this way, madame, three times a day," said he; "in the morning, at nine o'clock; at one o'clock in the afternoon; and at eight in the evening. If this should not be agreeable to you, you can appoint your own hours, instead of those which I propose, and on this point your wishes shall be attended to. A woman from the neighborhood has received instructions to attend upon you; she will henceforth reside in the castle, and will come whenever you require her presence."

"I thank you, sir," replied the prisoner, humbly.

Felton bowed slightly, and went toward the door. Just as he was about to step over the threshold, Lord de Winter appeared in the corridor, followed by the soldier who had been sent to inform him that her ladyship had fainted. He held in his hand a bottle of salts.

"Well, what is the matter here?" said he, in a jeering tone, when he saw the lady standing, and Felton just about to leave the room. "Is this dead person alive again? By Jove, Felton, my boy, did you not see that she took you for a novice, and gave you the first act of a comedy, of which we shall doubtless have the pleasure to see all the continuation?"

"I thought so, my lord," said Felton. "But after all, as the prisoner is a woman, I wished to have that consideration for her which is due from every well-bred man to a woman, if not for her sake, at least for his own."

Her ladyship shuddered throughout her frame. These words of Felton penetrated like ice through all her veins.

"So," continued Lord de Winter, still laughing, "these beautiful locks, so skillfully displayed, that delicate com-

plexion, and that languishing look, have not yet seduced your stony heart?"

"No, my lord," replied the insensible young man; "and, believe me, it requires more than the petty stratagems and affectations of a woman to corrupt me."

"As that is the case, my brave lieutenant, let us leave the lady to find something new, and let us go to supper. Oh, you may be quite easy; she has a very fertile imagination, and the second act of this comedy will soon follow the first."

As he uttered these words, Lord de Winter took Felton by the arm, and led him away, laughing.

"Oh! I will surely find what will be enough!" muttered her ladyship, between her teeth. "Make yourself easy, poor spoiled monk, poor converted soldier, whose uniform has been cut out of a churchman's habit!"

"Apropos, My Lady," said Lord de Winter, stopping on the threshold of the door, "do not allow this failure to disturb your appetite. Taste this fowl, and that fish, which on my honor, I have not had poisoned. I am on good terms with my cook, and, as he does not expect to be my heir, I have entire confidence in him. Do as I do. Farewell, my dear sister, till your next fainting-fit."

This was all that her ladyship could endure. Her hands grasped the arms of her chair convulsively, she ground her teeth heavily, her eyes followed the movement of the door as it closed behind Lord de Winter and Felton; and then, as soon as she found herself alone, a new paroxysm of despair invaded her—her glance wandered to the table; she saw a knife that glimmered on it, and rushing forward she snatched it up; but dreadful was her disappointment when she found that the edge was rounded, and the blade of flexible silver.

A shout of laughter resounded from behind the half-closed door, which was again opened.

“Ah, ah!” exclaimed Lord de Winter: “do you see, Felton? It is exactly as I told you. That knife was intended for you, my boy: she would have killed you. It is one of her vices, thus to get rid, in one way or another, of those who annoy her. If I had listened to you, the knife would have been of steel, and pointed; and then—farewell, Felton. She would have cut your throat first, and all our throats afterward. Just look, John, how well she holds her knife?”

Her ladyship, in fact, still held the inoffensive weapon in her convulsive grasp; but these last words, this crowning insult, unnerved her hands, her strength, and even her will, and the knife fell upon the ground.

“You are quite right, my lord,” said Felton, in a tone of deep disgust, which penetrated to the very recesses of her ladyship’s heart. “You are right, and I was in the wrong.”

And they both once more left the room.

But on this occasion the lady lent a more attentive ear than before and she heard their steps becoming more distant, until the sound was lost in the depths of the corridors.

“I am undone!” she muttered. “I am in the power of people over whom I shall have no greater influence than over statues of bronze or granite. They know me thoroughly, and wear breast-plates proof against my arms. And yet,” she continued a moment after, “it is impossible that everything should terminate as they have willed it.”

In fact, as this last remark, and this instinctive return to hope indicated, fear and all feeble sentiments could not long predominate in that deep-thinking soul. Her ladyship seated herself at a table, ate of various viands, drank a small quantity of Spanish wine, and felt that all her resolution was restored.

Before she retired to rest she had already studied, an-

alyzed, commented on, and examined, in every possible way, the words, the steps, the gesture, signs, and even the silence of her jailers ; and from this learned, and profound, and skillful examination it resulted that Felton was, upon the whole, the least invulnerable of the two.

One word especially recurred to the prisoner's mind.

"If I had listened to you," said Lord de Winter to Felton.

Felton, then, had spoken in her favor, since Lord de Winter had refused to listen to him. "Weak or strong," reasoned her ladyship, "this man has a ray of pity in his soul ; and of this ray I will make a flame that shall consume him. As to the other one, he knows me, he fears me, and knows what he has to expect from me should I ever escape from his hands ; it is, therefore, perfectly useless to attempt anything in reference to him. But, with Felton, it is different. He appears to be a simple, pure, and virtuous young man. There are means of winning him."

Her ladyship lay down, and slept with a smile upon her lips. Any one who had seen her sleeping, would have taken her for a young girl, dreaming of the garland of flowers which she was to braid around her forehead at the approaching ball.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE SECOND DAY OF IMPRISONMENT.

HER ladyship was dreaming that she had at last defeated D'Artagnan, and was looking on the spectacle of his death; and it was the sight of his abominated blood, flowing beneath the executioner's ax, which called forth the charming smile that hovered on her lips.

She slept like a prisoner lulled by a dawning hope.

On the next morning, when they entered the room, she was still in bed. Felton remained in the corridor. He had brought with him the woman of whom he had spoken on the previous evening, and who had just arrived. This woman entered, and approached her ladyship's bed, offering her services.

Her ladyship was habitually pale, and her complexion would, therefore, easily deceive any one who saw her for the first time.

"I am feverish," she said; "I have not slept a moment throughout the tedious night. I am in dreadful suffering: will you be more humane than they were yesterday evening? All I ask is, to be permitted to remain in bed."

"Would you like a physician to be sent for?" asked the woman.

Felton listened to this dialogue, without uttering a word.

Her ladyship reflected, that, the more numerous the persons who surrounded her, that many more would she have to influence and the more severe would be the vigilance of Lord de Winter. Besides, the physician might declare that the malady was feigned; and her lady-

ship, having lost the first throw, did not design to lose the second.

"A physician?" said she—"and for what purpose? Those gentlemen declared, yesterday, that my illness was all a comedy. It will undoubtedly be the same to-day for, since last night, there has been abundant time to prejudice the doctor."

"Then," said Felton, in a tone of impatience, "say yourself, madame, what you desire to have done."

"Ah, my God! can I tell? I feel my sufferings, and that is all. Give me what you please—it is of little consequence to me."

"Go for Lord de Winter," said Felton, wearied by these repeated complaints.

"Oh, no, no!" exclaimed the lady: "no, sir, do not send for him, I beseech you! I am very well—I do not want anything—do not send for him!"

She uttered this exclamation with a vehemence so natural, that Felton was attracted for a few steps into the chamber.

"He is touched," thought her ladyship.

"And yet, madame," said Felton, "if you are *really* suffering, we must send for a physician. If you are deceiving us, so much the worse for yourself; but, at all events, we shall have nothing to reproach ourselves with."

Her ladyship made no reply, but turning her beautiful head on the pillow, she burst into a paroxysm of tears and sobs.

Felton looked at her for a moment with his ordinary insensibility: but seeing that the crisis threatened to continue, he left the room.

The woman followed him; and Lord de Winter did not make his appearance.

"I think I begin to see my way," muttered the lady, with savage delight, as she buried herself under the bed.

clothes, to hide from those who might be watching her this burst of heartfelt satisfaction.

Two hours passed away.

"It is now time for my malady to end," thought she. "Let me get up and gain some benefit to-day. I have but ten days, and this evening two of them will have already passed away."

When the servants entered the lady's chamber in the morning, her breakfast was brought to her. She concluded that they would soon return to take it away, and that she should then see Felton again.

Her ladyship was not deceived. Felton reappeared, and, without noticing whether the lady had touched anything or not, he ordered the attendants to remove the table, which was generally brought in with everything prepared upon it.

Felton, holding a book in his hand, saw every other person leave the room.

Reclining in an easy-chair near the fire place, beautiful, pale, and resigned, her ladyship looked like a holy virgin expecting martyrdom.

Felton approached her, and said :

"Lord de Winter, who, like yourself, madame, is a Catholic, has imagined that it might be painful to you to be deprived of the rites and ceremonies of your religion ; he therefore permits you to read the daily office of your mass ; and here is a book which contains the ritual."

Observing the manner with which Felton laid the book on the little table near her ladyship, the tone in which he pronounced the words, *your mass*, and the contemptuous smile with which he accompanied them, her ladyship raised her head, and looked more attentively at the officer.

Then—by that precise manner of wearing the hair, by that dress of exaggerated simplicity, by that forehead, as

polished as marble, but equally hard and impenetrable—she recognized one of those gloomy Puritans, whom she had so often met with, both at the court of King James, and at that of the King of France, where, in spite of the recollections of St. Bartholomew, they sometimes came to seek a refuge.

She then experienced one of those sudden inspirations which are reserved for genius alone, on those great emergencies, those momentous crises, which decide their fortunes or their lives.

Those two words—*your mass*—and a single glance at Felton, had, in fact, revealed to her all the importance of the answer which she was about to make.

But, with that rapidity of intelligence which was peculiar to her, that answer presented itself, as if ready formed upon her lips.

“I?” said she, in an accent of contempt, equal to that which she had observed in the voice of the young officer—“I, sir!—*my mass*? Lord de Winter, the corrupted Catholic, well knows that I am not of his religion, and it is a snare which he wishes to spread for me.”

“And of what religion are you then, madame?” demanded Felton, with an astonishment which, in spite of his self-command, he could not perfectly conceal.

“I will tell it,” exclaimed the lady, with feigned enthusiasm, “when I shall have suffered sufficiently for my faith.”

The looks of Felton discovered to her ladyship all the extent of space which she had opened to herself by this single expression.

And yet the young officer remained mute and motionless. His countenance alone had spoken.

“I am in the hands of my enemies,” continued she, in the enthusiastic tone which she knew was popular amongst the Puritans. “Well! either may my God save me, or

may I perish for my God ! That is the answer which I beg you to convey to Lord de Winter ; and as to this book," continued she, pointing to the ritual with the tip of her finger, but without touching it, as though she would have been contaminated by the touch—"you may carry it away, and make use of it yourself; for you are, undoubtedly, doubly the accomplice of Lord de Winter—an accomplice in his persecution and an accomplice in his heresy."

Felton made no reply ; but he took the book with the same repugnance that he had before manifested, and in a pensive mood withdrew.

Lord de Winter came at about five in the evening. During the day, her ladyship had found time to trace the plan of her proceedings ; and she received him like a woman who had already recovered all her advantages.

"It appears," said the baron, seating himself on a chair opposite the lady, and stretching his feet carelessly towards the hearth, "it appears that we have made a slight apostacy."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I mean that since the last time we saw each other, we have changed our religion. Have you by chance married a third husband—a Protestant?"

"Explain yourself, my lord," replied the prisoner, with great dignity ; "for I hear your words, but I do not understand them."

"Then, the truth must be, that you have no religion at all. Well I like that the better," said Lord de Winter, with a sneer.

"It is certainly more in unison with your own principles," coldly replied the lady.

"Oh, I confess to you, that it is quite a matter of indifference to me."

"You cannot avow a religious indifference, my lord, but what your debauchery and crimes sufficiently confirm."

“What! and do you talk of debauchery, Madame Mes-salina? Do you talk of crimes, Lady Macbeth? Either I have misunderstood you, or you are, by God, exceedingly impudent.”

“You speak thus, my lord, because we are overheard,” coldly replied her ladyship, “and you wish to prejudice your jailers and your executioners against me.”

“My jailers! my executioners! Why, madame, you speak poetically, and yesterday’s comedy is turned tonight to tragedy. But, after all, in eight days you will be where you ought to be, and my task will be accomplished.”

“Infamous task! impious task!” replied the lady, with the feigned enthusiasm of the victim who provokes her judge.

“I verily believe, upon my honor,” said Lord de Winter, rising, “that this singular creature is going mad. Come, come, calm yourself, Madame Puritan, or I will put you into a dungeon. By Jove, it is my Spanish wine that has just got into your head, is it not? But be quiet: this intoxication is not dangerous, and will have no bad consequence.”

And Lord de Winter left the room swearing, which was at that time a perfectly gentlemanly habit.

Felton was, in fact, behind the door, and had not lost one syllable of the conversation.

Her ladyship had judged correctly.

“Yes, go, go!” said she to her brother. “The consequences are, on the contrary, fast approaching. But you, fool that you are, will not know them until it is too late to evade them.”

Silence again prevailed; and two more hours elapsed.

Supper was brought in, and her ladyship was found engaged in prayers—prayers which she had learned from an austere Puritan, an old servant of her second husband.

She appeared to be in a sort of ecstasy, and not even to observe what was passing around her.

Felton made a sign that she was not to be disturbed; and when everything was arranged, he softly left the room with the soldiers.

The lady knew that she might be watched, and, therefore, she continued at her prayers until the end. She fancied that the sentinel at her door did not maintain his usual step, but seemed to listen to her.

For the present, she desired nothing more. She arose, seated herself at the table, ate a little, and only drank some water.

In an hour afterward, the table was removed, but her ladyship remarked that, on this occasion, Felton did not accompany the soldiers.

He was afraid then of seeing her too often.

She turned aside to smile; for there was so much of triumph in that smile, that it alone would have betrayed her.

She allowed a half hour to elapse; and as everything was then entirely silent in the old castle—as no sound was heard but the eternal murmur of the surge, that mighty breathing of the sea—with her pure, thrilling, and harmonious voice she began a couplet of the psalms which was then in great favor with the Puritans :

“Thou leavest us, oh Lord !
To prove if we are strong ;
But then, thou dost afford
The need that to exertion should belong.”

These verses were not excellent; they were indeed, far enough from it; but as every one knows, the Protestants did not pride themselves on poetry.

Even as she sung her ladyship listened. The sentinel

on duty had stopped as if transformed to stone. Her ladyship judged by that of the effect she had produced.

She then continued her psalm with a fervor and feeling which are indescribable. It seemed to her as though the sound diffused itself afar off beneath the arches, and went like a magic charm to melt the hearts of her oppressors. Nevertheless it appeared as if the soldier on guard, a zealous Catholic, no doubt, shook off the charm, for through the wicket which he opened he exclaimed :

“ Be silent, madam ! Your song is as melancholy as a ‘ *de profundis* :’ and if, besides the pleasure of being shut up in this garrison, we must be compelled also to hear these things, it will be perfectly unbearable.”

“ Silence there !” cried a severe voice, which the lady recognized as that of Felton. “ What business is it of yours, fellow ? Did any one order you to hinder that woman from singing ? No. You were told to guard her—to fire upon her if she attempted to escape : guard her, then ; shoot her if she tries to escape ; but go not beyond your orders.”

An inexpressible gleam of joy illuminated the lady’s countenance ; but this expression was transient as the lightning’s flash ; and without appearing to have heard the dialogue, of which she had not lost a word, she resumed her singing, giving to her voice all the charm, all the power, all the seduction with which Satan had endowed it :

“ For all my fears and cares,
For exile and for chains,
I have my youth, my prayers,
And God, who keeps a record of my pains.”

That voice, of uncommon power and sublime passion, gave to the rude unpolished poetry of these psalms a magic and an expression which the most exalted Puritans rarely found in the songs of their brethren, and which

they were compelled to adorn with all the aids of imagination. Felton thought that he was listening to the singing of the angel who comforted the three Israelites in the fiery furnace.

The lady continued :

“ But God, the just and strong !
Our morn of freedom send—
And should our hopes be wrong,
Still martyrdom, still death, our trial ends ! ”

This last couplet, into which the enchantress had infused her whole soul, completed the disorder in the young officer’s heart. He opened the door suddenly, and her ladyship saw his countenance, as pale as ever, but with flashing and almost delirious eyes.

“ Why do you sing in this manner,” said he, “ and in such tones ? ”

“ Pardon me, sir,” said her ladyship, softly : “ I forgot that my songs were not becoming in this house. I have no doubt wounded your religious feelings, but I assure you that it was unintentionally. Pardon, therefore, a fault which may be great, but which was certainly involuntary.”

Her ladyship looked so beautiful at that moment, and the religious enthusiasm which she had assumed had given such an expression to her countenance that Felton completely dazzled, fancied that he now saw the angel which he had before only heard.

“ Yes, yes ! ” replied he, “ yes, you trouble, you agitate the inhabitants of the castle.”

But the poor madman did not perceive the incoherence of his own language, whilst her ladyship plunged her lynx eyes into the very depths of his heart.

“ I will be silent,” said she, casting down her eyes, with all the softness that she could give to her voice, and with

all the resignation which she could impress upon her manner.

"No, no, madame," said Felton : "only, do not sing so loud, and especially at night."

After these words, Felton found that he could no longer preserve his usual severity toward his prisoner, and he rushed out of the room.

" You are right, lieutenant," said the soldier ; " those songs disturb the soul ; and yet one becomes in time accustomed to them—the voice is so beautiful!"

CHAPTER LIV.

THE THIRD DAY OF IMPRISONMENT.

FELTON was attracted ; but more than this must yet be done : it was necessary that he should remain of himself ; and her ladyship had only an obscure perception of the means by which this result must be achieved.

But even more was needed. He must be made to speak, that she might also speak to him : for her ladyship was well aware that her most seductive power was in her voice, which could run skillfully through the whole scale of tones, from mortal speech upward to the language of heaven.

And yet, in spite of all this seduction, her ladyship might fail ; Felton had been forewarned against her, even against the smallest risk. From this time she studied all her actions, all her words, and even her slightest glance and gesture, nay, even her breathing, which might be interpreted as a sigh. In short, she studied everything, like a skillful actress who has just accepted a new character in a rôle which she has never been accustomed to perform.

Before Lord de Winter, her behavior was less difficult, and she had therefore determined upon that the evening before. To remain silent and dignified in his presence—from time to time irritate him by affected contempt, or by a disdainful expression—to urge him to menaces and violence, which would contrast so completely with her own perfect resignation—such was her ladyship's plan. Felton would see this ; perhaps he would say nothing : but, at any rate, he would see it.

In the morning, Felton came as usual ; but her ladyship allowed him to preside over all the preparations for breakfast, without addressing him. At the very moment that he was about to leave the room, she had a gleam of hope, for she thought that he was really about to speak ; but his lips moved without any sound issuing from them, and controlling himself by an effort, he suppressed in his own breast the words which he had nearly uttered, and withdrew.

About noon Lord de Winter entered.

It was rather a fine summer's day, and a beam of that pale English sun, which gives light but no warmth, penetrated through the bars of the prison.

Her ladyship looked out of the window, and pretended not to have heard the door open.

"Ah, ah ! " said Lord de Winter, " after having tried comedy and tragedy, we are now doing melancholy."

The prisoner did not answer.

"Yes, yes," continued his lordship ; "I understand it very well. You would gladly be free upon this beach. You would gladly enough, in some good ship, glide through the waves of that sea, which is as green as an emerald. You would gladly enough, whether on land or on the ocean, concoct against me one of those pretty little plots which you are so dexterous in contriving. Patience, patience ! In four days you shall be permitted to approach the beach, and the sea will be open to you—more open, perhaps, than you would wish—for in four days England will be rid of you."

Her ladyship clasped her hands and raised her eyes to heaven.

"Lord ! Lord ! " exclaimed she, with an angelic sweetness of gesture and of intonation, "forgive this man, as I myself forgive him ! "

"Yes, pray, accursed creature," exclaimed the baron.

“Your prayer is the more generous, as you are in the power of a man who, I swear, will never pardon you.”

And he left the room.

At the moment he went out, a piercing glance through the half opened door enabled her to perceive Felton, who drew back quickly, that he might not be seen.

She sank herself upon her knees and began to pray.

“My God—my God!” said she, “thou knowest for what sacred cause I suffer; give me, therefore, strength to bear my trials.”

The door opened softly; the beautiful suppliant pretended not to have heard it, and, with a voice almost suffocated by tears, she continued :

“Oh, God, the avenger! oh, God of mercy! will thou permit the wicked designs of this man to be accomplished?”

Then only she appeared to hear the sound of Felton’s footsteps, and rising as quick as thought, she blushed, as though ashamed at being seen upon her knees.

“I do not like to interrupt those who pray,” gravely observed Felton, “so do not disturb yourself on my account, I beseech you, madame.”

“How do you know that I was praying, sir?” said her ladyship, in a voice suffocated by sobs; “you are mistaken, sir, I was not praying.”

“Do you think, then, madame,” replied Felton, in his habitual grave voice, but with a gentler accent, “that I assume the right of hindering a fellow-creature from throwing herself at the foot of her Creator! God forbid! Besides, repentance is becoming in the guilty, whatever crime they may have committed; and a criminal prostrate before God is sacred in my eyes.”

“I guilty!” replied the lady, with a smile which would have disarmed the angel at the day of judgment. “Guilty! Oh, my God! thou knowest what I am! Say that I am

condemned, sir—yet you know that God, who loves martyrs sometimes permits the innocent to be condemned.”

“Were you condemned, were you innocent, and were you a martyr,” replied Felton, “you would have still more reason to pray, and I would myself assist you with my prayers.”

“Oh, you are a just man!” exclaimed her ladyship, throwing herself at his feet. “I can no longer restrain myself, for I fear that my strength will fail me at the moment when I must endure the trial and confess my faith. Listen, then, to the supplication of a woman in despair. They deceive you, sir. But that is not the point: I only ask one favor of you, and, if you grant it, I will bless you both in this world and the next.”

“Speak to my superior, madame,” said Felton. “Fortunately, I have no commission either to pardon or to punish: it is to one higher than I that God has given this responsibility.”

“To you—no, to you alone. Listen to me, rather than contribute to my destruction and my shame.”

“If you have deserved this disgrace, madame—if you have incurred this ignominy—you should bear it as an offering to God.”

“What mean your words. Oh! you do not understand me! When I talk of ignominy, you think that I speak of some punishment—of imprisonment, or of death. Would to God it were so. What care I for death or imprisonment!”

“It is I who do not understand you now, madame,” said Felton.

“Or who pretend that you no longer understand me,” replied the prisoner, with a smile of doubt.

“No, madame, on my honor as a soldier, on my faith as a Christian!”

"What! do you not know the designs which Lord de Winter has against me?"

"I do not know them."

"Impossible! You are his confidant."

"Madame, I never tell falsehoods!"

"Oh! but he is too unreserved for you to have failed to guess them."

"Madame, I never attempt to guess anything. I always wait for confidence; and, except what Lord de Winter has said in your presence, he has told me nothing."

"Then," exclaimed the lady, with an indescribable accent of truth, "you are not his accomplice? You do not know that he destines for me a disgrace which all the punishments on earth could not equal in horror?"

"You are mistaken, madame," said Felton coloring; "Lord de Winter is not capable of such a crime."

"Good!" said the lady to herself: "without knowing what it is he calls it a crime."

Then she added, aloud—

"The friend of the wretch is capable of anything."

"And whom do you call a wretch?" said Felton.

"Are there, then, two men in England to whom that term can be appropriate?"

"You mean George Villiers?" said Felton.

"Whom the pagans, the Gentiles, and the infidels, call Duke of Buckingham," resumed her ladyship. "I would not have believed that there was a man in all England who would have required so much explanation to recognize the person I alluded to."

"The hand of the Lord is stretched over him; he will not escape the punishment that he deserves."

Felton only expressed, concerning the duke, that sentiment of execration which had been vowed by every Englishman against him, whom Catholics themselves called

the tyrant, the extortioner, and the profligate ; and whom the Puritans simply termed Satan.

“ Oh, my God ! my God ! ” exclaimed the lady, “ when I beseech thee to inflict upon that man the punishment which is his due, thou knowest that I seek not the gratification of my own revenge, but that I implore the deliverance of a whole nation.”

“ Do you know him, then, madame ? ” inquired Felton.

“ He questions me at last,” said her ladyship to herself, delighted at having so quickly gained the great result.

“ Oh, yes, I know him. Oh, yes, to my misfortune—to my eternal misfortune.”

And her ladyship threw up her arms, as if in a paroxysm of grief.

Felton no doubt felt that his strength was giving way ; he made some steps toward the door, but the prisoner, who did not lose sight of him, bounded after him, and stopped his progress.

“ Sir,” said she, “ be good—hear my prayer ! That knife, of which the fatal prudence of the baron deprived me because he knew the use I should make of it—oh, hear me to the end—that knife, return it to me only for one instant for mercy’s, for pity’s sake ! I clasp your knees. See, you may shut the door—I do not want to injure you. Oh, God ! How could I have any design against you—you, the only just and good, and compassionate being that I have met with—you, perhaps my preserver. One minute the knife ;—only one minute—I will return it to you through the wicket of the door. Only one minute, Mr Felton, and you will have saved my honor.”

“ To kill yourself ! ” exclaimed Felton, in great terror, and forgetting to withdraw his hands from the hands of his prisoner—“ to kill yourself ! ”

“ I have said it, sir,” murmured the lady, dropping her voice, and sinking exhausted on the floor ; “ I have

divulged my secret. He knows all, and oh, my God! I am lost!"

Felton remained standing motionless and undecided.

"He still doubts," thought the lady. "I have not been true enough to the character I am acting."

Some one was heard in the corridor, and her ladyship recognized the slow step of Lord de Winter.

Felton also recognized it, and approached the door.

Her ladyship rushed forward.

"Oh! not one word," she cried, in a concentrated voice. "Not one word of what I have said to you to that man, or I am lost: and it is you—you—"

Then, as the steps drew nearer, she was silent, lest her voice should be heard, and merely pressed her beautiful hand on Felton's lips, with a gesture of infinite terror.

Felton softly repulsed her, and she sank upon a couch.

Lord de Winter passed by the door without stopping, and his departing steps were heard in the distance.

Felton, pale as a corpse, stood for some moments intently listening: then when the sound had entirely ceased he breathed like a man awaking from a dream, and rushed out of the room.

"Ah!" said her ladyship, as she listened in turn to the sound of Felton's steps, as he retreated in the direction opposite to that of Lord de Winter, "at last, then, you are mine."

But instantly her countenance grew dark.

"If he should speak to the baron," said she, "I am ruined; for the baron, who well knows that I would not destroy myself, will place me before him with a knife in my hand, and he will at once perceive that all this great despair is but a farce."

She went and stood before a glass, and gazed upon herself. Never had she been more beautiful.

"Oh, yes," she said, smiling, "but he will *not* tell him!"

In the evening, Lord de Winter came in, when the supper was brought.

"Sir," said her ladyship to him, "is your presence to be a compulsory aggravation of my imprisonment, and cannot you spare me that additional torture which your visits cause me?"

"Why, my dear sister," said the baron, "did you not sentimentally announce to me, with that pretty mouth which is to-day so cruel, that you came to England for the sole purpose of seeing me without restraint—a pleasure of which, you told me, you felt the privation so strongly, that you had, for it, risked sea-sickness, storms, and captivity. Well, here I am, and you ought to be satisfied. But, besides, I have a particular reason for my visit this time."

Her ladyship shuddered, for she thought that Felton had spoken. Never, perhaps, in her whole life, had this woman, who had experienced so many strong and opposite emotions, felt her heart beat so violently. She was sitting down. Lord de Winter took a chair, drew it to her side, and seated himself upon it; then he took from his pocket, a paper which he slowly unfolded.

"Here," said he: "I wished to show you the sort of passport which I have myself drawn up, and which will serve as a kind of warrant, in the life which I permit you to lead."

Then, directing her ladyship's eyes to the paper, he read:

"Order to convey to——"

"The name is left blank," said the baron, "if you have any preference, you will let me know, and, provided it be a thousand leagues from London, your request shall be attended to. So I resume—'Order to convey to —— Charlotte Backson, branded by the justice of the kingdom of

France, but liberated after punishment. She will reside in that place, without ever going more than three leagues from it. In case of any attempt to escape, she is to be put to death. She will be allowed five shillings a day for her lodging and support."

"This warrant does not concern me," said her ladyship, coldly, "since a name is inserted in it which is not mine."

"A name! And have you one?"

"I have that of your brother."

"You make a mistake: my brother was only your second husband, and your first is still alive. Tell me his name, and I will insert it instead of Charlotte Backson. No, you will not—you are silent. Very well; you shall be registered under the name of Charlotte Backson."

Her ladyship remained silent: not now from affectation, but from fear. She believed that the warrant was to be immediately executed; she thought that Lord de Winter had hurried forward her departure: she thought herself condemned to go that very evening. For an instant, therefore, she imagined that all hope was gone, when she suddenly perceived that the warrant had no signature.

The joy she experienced at this discovery was so great that she was unable to conceal it.

"Yes, yes," said Lord de Winter, who saw what was passing in her mind; "yes, you are looking for the signature, and you say to yourself—'all is not lost since the warrant is not signed! He shows it to me to frighten me, that is all.' But you deceive yourself; this warrant will be sent to-morrow to the Duke of Buckingham, on the day after it will be signed by his hand, and sealed with his seal; and four-and-twenty hours after, I answer for it that the execution of it shall have begun. Adieu, madame; that is all that I have to say to you."

"And I reply to you, sir, that this abuse of power, this banishment under a false name, is infamous!"

"Would your ladyship prefer being hanged under your true name? You know that the English laws are inexorable concerning the abuse of the marriage contract. Explain yourself freely. Although my name, or rather my brother's, is mixed up with all this, I will risk the scandal of a public trial, to be sure of my aim in getting rid of you."

Her ladyship made no answer: but she became as pale as a lifeless form.

"Oh, I see you would rather travel. Very well, madame; there is a proverb which says that traveling is beneficial to youth. Faith, you are right, after all. Life is sweet; and that is the reason why I am not very anxious that you should take mine away. There remains, then, only the settlement of the five shillings a day. I am a little too parsimonious, am I not? But it is because I do not wish you to corrupt your keepers. Besides, you will still have your charms to seduce them with. Try them, if your failure with Felton has not disgusted you with attempts of that kind."

"Felton has not spoken," said her ladyship to herself; "so nothing is lost after all."

"And now, madame, farewell; to-morrow I shall come and apprise you of the departure of my messenger."

Lord de Winter arose, bowed sarcastically to her ladyship, and left the room.

Her ladyship breathed again. She had yet four days before her; and four days would suffice for her to obtain complete mastery over Felton.

And yet a terrible idea suggested itself to her mind. Perhaps Lord de Winter might send Felton himself with the warrant to Buckingham; and thus Felton would escape her; to insure her success, it was necessary that the magic charm of her seduction should be undisturbed.

Yet, as we have said, one thing reassured her: Felton had not spoken.

She did not wish to appear disheartened by the threats of Lord de Winter : she therefore sat down at table and ate. Then, as she had done the night before, she fell upon her knees and repeated her prayers aloud. And, as on the previous evening, the soldier ceased his walk, and stood to listen.

But she soon heard steps, lighter than those of the sentinel, approaching from the end of the corridor, and stopping before her door.

“It is he!” she said ; and she began the same religious strains which had so violently excited Felton on the evening before.

But, although her soft, full sonorous voice now thrilled more touchingly and more harmoniously than ever, the door continued closed. It did indeed appear to her ladyship, in one of those furtive glances which she directed to the little wicket, that she could perceive, through the close grating, the ardent eyes of the young man ; but, whether this was a reality or a vision, he had at least sufficient self-control, on this occasion, to keep himself from coming in.

Yet, in a few moments after the conclusion of her religious hymn, her ladyship fancied that she heard a deep sigh, and then the same steps that she had heard approaching retired slowly, and, as it were, reluctantly.

CHAPTER LV.

THE FOURTH DAY OF IMPRISONMENT.

WHEN Felton entered the room the next day, he found her ladyship mounted on a chair, holding in her hand a cord made of some cambric handkerchiefs, torn into strips, twisted together, and fastened end to end. At the noise Felton made in opening the door, her ladyship lightly jumped off her chair, and endeavored to conceal behind her the extemporaneous cord which she held in her hand.

The young man was even more pale than usual, and his eyes, red from want of sleep, proved that he had passed through a feverish night. And yet his forehead was more serenely austere than ever.

He slowly advanced toward her ladyship, who had seated herself, and took hold of the end of this murderous woof, which inadvertently, or perhaps intentionally, she had left unconcealed.

“What is this, madame?” he asked, coldly.

“That? Nothing!” said her ladyship, smiling with that melancholy expression, which she so well knew how to impress upon her smile. “Weariness, you know, is the mortal enemy of prisoners. I was wearied, and, therefore, I amused myself with twisting this cord.”

Felton cast his eyes up to that part of the wall where he had seen her ladyship standing on the chair which she was now sitting on, and above her head, he saw a gilded hook fastened in the wall, which was placed there to support either clothes or arms.

He started, and the prisoner saw him start : for, though her eyes were cast down, nothing escaped her observation.

"And why were you standing on this chair ?" he asked.

"What does it signify to you?" replied the lady.

"But," resumed Felton, "I desire to know."

"Do not question me," said the prisoner : "you know that to us true Christians it is forbidden to speak falsehood."

"Well," said Felton. "I will tell you what you were doing, or rather, what you were about to do. You were about to complete the fatal work which you meditated. Remember, madame, if your God has forbidden you to speak falsehood, he has much more emphatically forbidden you to commit suicide."

"When God sees one of his creatures unjustly persecuted—placed, as it were, between suicide and dishonor—believe me, sir," replied her ladyship, in a tone of profound conviction, "God will pardon suicide, for suicide then becomes martyrdom."

"You either say too much, or too little. Speak, madame; in the name of Heaven, explain yourself."

"What ! shall I relate my misfortunes to you, that you may treat them as fables—shall I tell you my designs, that you may disclose them to my persecutor ? No, sir ! Besides, of what consequence can the life or death of an unhappy convict be to you ? You are only responsible for my body, are you not ? And provided you produced a dead body, which could be recognized as mine, no more would be required of you, and you might perhaps even receive a double reward."

"I, madame!" exclaimed Felton. "Then you suppose that I would ever receive a price for your life ? Oh ! you do not believe what you are saying !"

"Leave me to myself, Felton—leave me to myself," said

her ladyship, with some excitement : “ every soldier ought to be ambitious, ought he not ? You are a lieutenant ; well, you would follow at my funeral with the rank of captain.”

“ But what have I done to you, then ? ” said Felton, much agitated, “ that you should burden me with such a heavy responsibility before God and man ? In a few days you will be far from here, madame. Your life will then be no longer under my care ; and,” he added, with a sigh, “ then—then you can do with it what you will.”

“ So ! ” exclaimed her ladyship, as though unable to restrain her holy indignation. “ You, a pious man—you, who are regarded as a just man—you only demand one thing, and that is, not to be inculpated, not to be inconvenienced, by my death.”

“ It is my duty to watch over your life, madame, and I will do so.”

“ But, do you understand the duty you discharge ? It is cruel, even if I were guilty ; but what name will you give it—with what term will the Almighty brand it—if I am innocent.”

“ I am a soldier, madame ; and I execute the orders that I have received.”

“ And do you believe that, at the day of final judgment the Almighty will make a distinction between the hoodwinked executioner and the unrighteous judge ? You will not allow me to kill my body, and yet you make yourself the instrument of him who wishes to kill my soul ! ”

“ But, I repeat to you,” said Felton, much moved, “ that no danger threatens you ; I will answer for Lord de Winter as for myself.”

“ Madman ! ” exclaimed her ladyship, “ poor madman, who presumes to answer for another, when the wisest, those who are the most after God’s own heart, are afraid of answering for themselves, and who join the party of

the strongest and most fortunate, to overwhelm the weakest and most miserable!"

"Impossible, madame, impossible!" muttered Felton, as he felt in his heart's core the justice of this argument: "whilst a prisoner, you will not recover your liberty through me; whilst alive, you will not lose your life by my connivance."

"Yes," exclaimed her ladyship, "but I shall lose what is much dearer to me than life—I shall lose my honor, Felton; and it is you whom I will make responsible, before God and man, for my shame and infamy!"

On this occasion, Felton, insensible as he was, or as he pretended to be, could no longer resist the secret influence which had already enthralled him. To see this woman, so beautiful, fair as the brightest vision—to hear her by turns imploring and threatening—to suffer at the same time the ascendancy of grief and beauty, was too much for a visionary man, the strength of whose brain was sapped by the ardent dreams of an ecstatic faith; it was too much for a heart corroded, at the same time, by the love of Heaven, which burns, and by the hatred of mankind, which destroys.

Her ladyship perceived his agitation: she felt intuitively the contending passions which burned with the blood in the young fanatic's veins; and, like a skillful general, who sees the enemy preparing to retreat, and then rushes upon him with a shout of victory, she arose—beautiful as a priestess of antiquity—inspired as a Christian virgin—and, with extended arms, and neck uncovered, and disheveled hair—with a hand modestly confining her dress upon her bosom, and with a glance illuminated by that fire which had already carried disorder into the senses of the young Puritan, she walked towards him, uttering to an impetuous air, in that sweet voice to which she gave so terrible an emphasis:

“To Baal his victim send ;
To lions cast the martyr ;
Yet vengeance is God’s charter !
To him my cries ascend.”

Felton stood like one petrified.

“Who are you ? What are you ?” exclaimed he, clasping his hands : “are you an angel or a demon ? Are you Eloas or Astarte ?”

“Have you not recognized me, Felton ? I am neither angel nor demon : I am but a daughter of the earth, a sister in your faith—nothing more !”

“Yes, yes,” said Felton. “I suspected it at first, but now I am convinced.”

“You are convinced ! And yet you are the accomplice of that child of Belial, whom men call Lord de Winter. You are convinced, and yet you leave me in the hands of my enemies—of the enemy of England, and of the enemy of God ! You are convinced, and yet you deliver me up to him who fills and pollutes the world with his heresies and debaucheries—to that infamous Sardanapalus, whom the blind call Buckingham, and the believers Antichrist !”

“I deliver you up to Buckingham ! I ! What is the meaning of your words ?”

“They have eyes,” exclaimed the lady, “and they will not see; they have ears, and they will not hear.”

“Yes, yes,” said Felton, drawing his hand over his damp brow, as if to drag away his last remaining doubt ; “yes, I recognize the voice that speaks to me in my dreams ; yes, I recognize the features of the angel which visits me each night, crying to my sleepless soul—strike ! save England ! save thyself ! for thou wilt die without having appeased the Lord ! Speak,” cried Felton, “speak ! I can understand you now.”

A flash of fearful delight, but rapid as thought, gleamed from her ladyship’s eyes.

Fugitive as was this homicidal glance, Felton perceived it and started, as if it had thrown light into the dark abysses of that woman's heart.

He suddenly recalled the warnings of Lord de Winter, the seductions of her ladyship; and her first attempts on her arrival: he retreated a step, and drooped his head, but without ceasing to look at her; as if, fascinated by this singular being, he could not turn his eyes away.

Her ladyship was not the woman to misunderstand the meaning of this hesitation. In the midst of these apparent emotions her icy coolness did not leave her. Before receiving Felton's answer, which would have obliged her to resume this conversation, impossible to sustain in the same exalted strain, she let her hands fall, as if the weakness of the woman resumed its ascendancy over the enthusiasm of the inspired saint.

"But no," said she, "it is not for me to be the Judith who will deliver Bethulia from this Holofernes. The sword of the Eternal One is too heavy for my arm. Let me, then, escape dishonor by death—let me find a refuge in martyrdom. I neither ask for liberty, like a criminal, nor for vengeance, like a pagan. To be allowed to die, is all that I demand. I entreat you, I implore you on my knees—let me die—and my last sigh shall breathe forth a blessing on my preserver!"

At this voice, so soft and supplicating—at this look, so timid and submissive, Felton advanced towards her. By degrees the enchantress had resumed that magic charm which she took up and laid aside at pleasure; that is to say, beauty, softness, tears, and above all, the irresistible attraction of that mystical voluptuousness which is the most irresistible of all voluptuousness.

"Alas!" said Felton, "I can only pity you, if you prove to me that you are a victim. But Lord de Winter makes most serious complaints against you. You are a Christian

woman—you are my sister in the faith. I feel myself drawn towards you—I, who have never loved any one but my benefactor—I, who have only found traitors, and infidels, throughout my life. But you, madame—you, so truly beautiful—you, apparently so pure, must have committed many crimes for Lord de Winter to pursue you thus."

"They have eyes," repeated the lady, with indescribable softness, "and they will not see; they have ears, and they will not hear."

"But then," exclaimed the young officer, "speak—oh, speak."

"What, confide my shame to you!" exclaimed the lady, with the blush of modesty upon her face: "often the crime of one is the shame of another. To confide my crime to you, a man, and I a woman! Oh!" she continued modestly placing her hand before her eyes, "Oh! never, never could I dare."

"To me, as to a brother!" exclaimed Felton. The lady gazed at him for a long time with an expression which Felton took for doubt, but which was, nevertheless, only observation and a desire to fascinate.

A suppliant in his turn, Felton clasped his hands.

"Well, then!" exclaimed the lady, "I will dare trust my brother."

At this moment the step of Lord de Winter was heard. But the dreaded brother-in-law was not content, this time, merely to pass the door, as he had done the evening before: he stopped, and, after exchanging two words with the sentinel, he opened the door and entered.

Whilst these two words were being spoken, Felton had rapidly moved from the lady's side, and when Lord de Winter appeared, he was standing at some distance from the prisoner.

The baron entered slowly, and cast a searching glance from the prisoner to the young officer.

" You have been here a long time, John," said he. " Has this woman related her crimes to you? If so I can comprehend the length of the interview."

Felton started ; and her ladyship felt that she was lost if she did not come to the assistance of the disconcerted Puritan.

" Ah ! you feared that your prisoner had escaped you !" said she. " Well ! ask your jailer what favor I was but now soliciting of him."

" And were you asking a favor ? " said the baron suspiciously.

" Yes, my lord," replied the young man, much confused.

" And what favor ? Come, let us hear," added Lord de Winter.

" A knife—which she would return to me, through the wicket, an instant after she had received it," replied Felton.

" Is there any one, then, concealed here, whose throat this gracious person wishes to cut ? " inquired Lord de Winter, in a tone of mockery and contempt.

" Yes, I am here ! " replied her ladyship.

" I gave you your choice between America and Tyburn," replied Lord de Winter ; " choose Tyburn, my lady ; the rope is, believe me, surer than the knife."

Felton grew pale, and made one step forward : for he remembered that when he came in, the lady held a cord in her hand.

" You are right," said she, " and I had already thought of it." Then she added in a lower voice : " I will think of it again."

Felton shuddered even to the very marrow of his bones. Lord de Winter probably observed it, for he said :

" John, my friend, beware. I have placed my confi-

dence in you : be watchful : I have warned you. Besides, be of good cheer, my boy : in three days we shall get rid of this creature, and where I send her, she can never again injure any one."

" You hear him," cried her ladyship, with a burst of indignation, which the baron thought was addressed to heaven, but which Felton comprehended was for him.

Felton held down his head and mused.

The baron took the officer by the arm, turning his head over his shoulder, so as not to lose sight of the lady while he was in the room.

" Come, come," reasoned the prisoner, when the door was shut, " I am not so far advanced as I believe myself to be. De Winter has changed his customary stupidity, into unparalleled prudence. This is the desire of vengeance ; and thus does that desire form a man ! As to Felton he wavers. Ah ! he is not a man of resolution like that cursed D'Artagnan. A puritan adores only virgins and adores them with clasped hands ; a musketeer adores women and loves them with arms clasped round them."

Nevertheless, her ladyship remained in anxious expectation. She thought that the day would not pass away without her seeing Felton again. As last, about an hour after the scene we have just narrated, she heard some whispering at the door which was soon afterward opened, and she recognized Felton.

The young man came hastily into the room, leaving the door open behind him, and signed to her ladyship to be silent. His countenance was fearfully excited.

" What do you want ?" said she.

" Listen !" replied Felton, in a slow voice. " I have just dismissed the sentinel, that I may remain here without any one knowing that I am come, and speak to you with-

out any one overhearing what I say. The baron has just related to me a terrible tale."

The lady assumed her smile of a resigned victim, and shook her head.

"Either you are a demon," continued Felton, "or the baron—my benefactor, my more than father—is a monster. I have known you for four days—I have loved him ten years; therefore I may well hesitate between you two. Be not alarmed at what I say: I want to be convinced. This night, after midnight, I shall come to you, and you must convince me."

"No, Felton—no, my brother," said she, "the sacrifice is too great, and I see what it will cost you. No, I am lost—do not destroy yourself with me. My death will be far more eloquent than my life, and the silence of the dead body will convince you better than the living prisoner's words."

"Be silent, madame," said Felton, "and do not speak to me thus. I have come that you may promise me upon your honor—that you may swear to me by that which is most sacred to you—that you will not make any attempt upon your life."

"I will not promise," said her ladyship; "for no one repects an oath more than I do; and, if I promise, I must keep my word."

"Well," said Felton, "bind yourself only till I have seen you once again. If, after we have met, you still persist, you will then be free, and I myself shall then provide you with the weapon you have asked for."

"So be it!" said her ladyship; "for your sake, I will wait."

"Swear it."

"I swear it by our God! Are you satisfied?"

"Well," said Felton, "this night."

And he rushed out of the apartment, shut the door

again and waited outside, with the soldier's half-pike in his hand, as if he were mounting guard.

The soldier having returned, Felton gave him back his weapon.

Then, through the wicket, which she had approached, her ladyship saw the young man cross himself with delirious fervor, and hurry along the corridor in a transport of delight.

As for herself she returned to her seat with a smile of savage scorn upon her lips, and she blasphemously repeated the fearful name of that God by whom she had just sworn, without ever having learned to know him.

“My God!” she said. “Fanatical fool!—*My* God is myself; and he who will assist in my revenge!”

CHAPTER LVI.

THE FIFTH DAY OF IMPRISONMENT.

MY LADY had, however, achieved a half triumph, and the success she had obtained renewed her strength.

There was no difficulty in vanquishing, as she had hitherto done, men ready to be led astray, and whom the education of a gallant court swiftly drew into her snares. Her ladyship was beautiful enough to fascinate the senses, and skillful enough to prevail over all the obstacles of mind.

But, on this occasion, she had to strive against an untutored nature, concentrated and made impassible by austerity. Religion and penitence had made of Felton a man impenetrable to all ordinary seductions. Schemes so vast, projects so tumultuous, were floating in that fervid brain, that there was no room for love—the sentiment that feeds itself on leisure, and thrives and fattens on corruption. Her ladyship had, by her pretended virtue, made a breach in the opinion of a man prejudiced against her, and, by her beauty, in the heart and senses of a pure and candid man. By this experiment upon the most rebellious subject that nature and religion could submit to her consideration, she had at last taken the measurement of powers hitherto unknown even to herself.

Often, however, during the evening, had she despaired of fate, and of herself. We know that she did not invoke

the aid of God ; she trusted in the genius of evil—that boundless sovereignty which rules over the details of human life, and for which, as in the Arabian fable, a pomegranate seed suffices to build up again a ruined world.

Her ladyship, being quite ready to receive Felton, was at liberty to make her batteries ready for the next day. She well knew that only two days remained for her ; that, were the warrant once signed by Buckingham—and Buckingham would sign it the more freely, as it bore a false name, and he could not recognize the real woman whom it concerned—this warrant once signed, we say the baron would immediately send her on board ; and she knew, also, that women condemned to transportation, use, in their seductions, arms much less powerful than those pretended virtuous women, whose beauty is illumined by the sun of fashion, whose wit is vaunted by the voice of the world, and whom an aristocratic beam gilds with its enchanted light. To be a woman condemned to a wretched and disgraceful punishment, is no impediment to beauty, but is an insurmountable obstacle to power. Like all persons of real genius, her ladyship well knew what accorded with her nature and her means. Poverty disgusted her—subjection deprived her of two-thirds of her greatness. Her ladyship was only a queen amongst queens ; the enjoyment of satisfied pride was essential to her sway. To command beings of an inferior nature, was, to her, rather a humiliation than a pleasure.

She should most assuredly return from her banishment ; of that she had not the slightest doubt ; but how long would that banishment continue ? To an active and ambitious nature, like that of her ladyship, the days which are not spent in self-elevation are unlucky ones. What, then, can we call the days of bitter descent ? To lose one, two, three years, that is, an actual eternity ; to return, perhaps, after the death or the disgrace of the cardinal ;

to return when D'Artagnan and his friends, happy and successful, had received from the queen the recompense that they so richly merited by their services to her—these were the devouring thoughts which a woman like her ladyship was quite unable to endure. Besides, the storm which raged in her breast was increasing in its violence, and she would have burst her prison walls if her body could have attained, for a single instant, the same proportions as her soul.

And then, in the midst of all this, she was goaded by the remembrance of the cardinal. What would be thought, what would be said, of her silence by that cardinal, so distrustful, so anxious, and so suspicious—that cardinal, who was not only her sole support, her sole stay, her sole protector, for the present, but, also, the principal instrument of her future fortune and revenge? She knew him well; she knew that, on her return from a fruitless expedition, she would in vain talk of her imprisonment—she would in vain exaggerate her sufferings. The cardinal would answer, with the mocking calmness of the skeptic, strong at once in power and in genius,

“You should not have allowed yourself to be entrapped.”

Her ladyship then concentrated all her energy, murmuring forth, in the intricacies of her thought, the name of Felton, the sole gleam of light which visited her, in the depths of that hell into which she had fallen; and like a serpent coiling and uncoiling its rings, to satisfy itself of its own strength, she, by anticipation, enveloped Felton in the countless folds of her own inventive imagination.

Yet time rolled on. The hours, one after the other, appeared to arouse the clock as they passed, every stroke vibrated in the prisoner's heart. At nine o'clock, Lord de Winter paid his customary visit; looked at the windows and bars; sounded the floorings and the walls; and examined the chimney and the doors; yet, during this long

and minute investigation, not one word was uttered either by her ladyship or by him.

"Come, come," said the baron, as he left the room, "you will not escape to-night."

At ten o'clock Felton came to relieve the sentinel at the door. Her ladyship now recognized his step as a mistress recognizes that of a lover, and yet she both hated and despised this weak fanatic.

It was not the appointed time, so Felton did not enter the room.

Two hours after, just at the stroke of twelve, the sentinel was relieved.

And now the time had come, and, from this moment, her ladyship waited with impatience.

The new sentinel began to walk along the corridor.

In ten minutes Felton came. Her ladyship listened.

"Observe," said the young man to the sentinel; "on no account whatever are you to leave this door; for you know that a soldier was punished for leaving his post for a moment last night, although it was I who kept guard during his short absence."

"Yes, I know it," said the soldier.

"I advise you, therefore, to adopt the strictest vigilance. For my part, I am going to inspect the room again, and to observe this woman, who has, I fear, conceived some violent designs against herself. My orders are to watch her closely."

"Good!" murmured her ladyship. "There is the austere Puritan telling a lie."

The soldier smiled.

"By Jove, lieutenant," said he, "you are not very unlucky in getting such a commission."

Felton blushed. Under any other circumstances he would have rebuked the soldier, who indulged in such a

joke ; but his own conscience was now criminating him too loudly to permit his tongue to speak.

"If I call," said he, "come in ; and also, if any one comes, call me."

"Yes, sir," said the soldier.

Felton entered the room. Her ladyship arose.

"You have come," said she.

"I promised to come," replied Felton, "and I am here."

"You promised me something else, also," said she.

"What, then, oh, my God !" said the young man, who, in spite of all his self-command, felt his knees tremble, and his brow grow damp.

"You promised to bring me a knife, and to leave it with me after our interview."

"Do not speak of that, madame," said Felton ; "there is no situation, however terrible it may be, that can authorize one of God's creatures to destroy himself. I have reflected that I never ought to render myself guilty of such a crime."

"Ah, you have reflected !" said the prisoner, again seating herself in her chair, with a disdainful smile. "And I, also, have reflected."

"About what ?"

"That I had nothing to say to a man who did not keep his word."

"Oh, my God !" murmured Felton.

"You may leave the room," said her ladyship, "I shall not speak."

"Here is the knife," said Felton, taking from his pocket the weapon, which he had, according to his promise, brought, although he hesitated to intrust it to his prisoner.

"Let me look at it," said the lady.

"For what purpose ?" said Felton.

"Upon my honor I will return it immediately. You may lay it on the table and stand between it and me."

Felton gave the weapon to her ladyship who examined it attentively, and tried its point upon the end of her finger.

"Very well," said she, returning the knife to the young officer; "it is a serviceable weapon: you are a faithful friend, Felton."

Felton took the knife, and laid it upon the table, as had been agreed with the prisoner.

Her ladyship's eyes followed him, with a satisfied glance.

"Now," said she, "listen to me."

The injunction was unnecessary; for the young man stood before her, waiting for her words, that he might feast upon them.

"Felton," said her ladyship, with a melancholy solemnity—"Felton, if your sister, the daughter of your father, should say to you—Whilst still young, and unfortunately beautiful, I was decoyed into a snare, but I resisted; temptations and assaults were multiplied around me, but I resisted; the religion that I serve, and the God whom I adore, were blasphemed because I called that God and that religion to my aid, and I resisted: then, outrages were heaped upon me, and, as they could not sacrifice my soul, they determined forever to defile my body; at last—"

Her ladyship stopped, and a bitter smile was visible on her lips.

"At last," said Felton, "and what did they do at last?"

"At last they resolved one night to paralyze that resistance which they could not overcome; one night they mixed a powerful narcotic with my drink. Scarcely had I finished my repast, before I found myself sinking gradually into an unusual torpor. Although I had no suspicions, yet a nameless dread made me struggle against this drowsiness. I arose; I endeavored to reach the

window, to call for help; but my limbs refused to bear me up, it seemed to me as if the ceiling lowered itself on my head, and crushed me with its weight. I stretched forth my arms, and endeavored to speak, but could only utter inarticulate sounds; an irresistible numbness stole upon me, and I clung to my chair, feeling that I was about to fall, but even this support was soon insufficient for my feeble arms; I fell, first on one knee, then on both; I sought to pray, but my tongue was frozen, God neither saw nor heard me, and I sank upon the floor, subjugated by a sleep resembling death.

“Of all the time which elapsed during this sleep, I had no recollection whatever. The only thing I can remember, is that I awoke, and found myself transported into a circular chamber, most sumptuously furnished, into which no light penetrated save through an aperture in the ceiling. There seemed to be no door to enter at; it looked like a magnificent prison.

“It was a long time before I could observe the place in which I was or recall the circumstances which I now relate. My mind appeared to struggle in vain against the oppressive darkness of that sleep, from which I was unable to escape. I had some vague perceptions of a space passed over, and of the rolling of a carriage; but all this was so misty, and so indistinct, that these events appeared rather to belong to the life of some other person than to my own, and yet to be incorporated with mine through some fantastical duality.

“For some time, the state in which I found myself appeared so strange that I supposed it was a dream. By degrees, however, the fearful reality forced itself upon me: I was no longer in the house I had inhabited. As well as I could judge by the light of the sun, two-thirds of the day were already spent. It was on the evening of the previous day that I had fallen asleep: my slumber had,

therefore, lasted nearly twenty-four hours. What had happened during this protracted sleep?

"I arose, staggering. All my slow and torpid movements showed that the influence of the narcotic had not yet ceased. I found that my chamber had been furnished for the reception of a woman; and the most complete coquette could not have formed a wish, that, in looking around the apartment, she would not have found fulfilled.

"Assuredly I was not the first captive who had been confined within that splendid prison. But you understand, Felton, the more beautiful the prison, the more was I alarmed. Yes, it was a prison: for I in vain endeavored to escape. I tried all the walls to find a door; but everywhere the walls gave back a dull and heavy sound. I went round this room, perhaps twenty times, seeking some kind of outlet; there was none; and I sunk upon a chair, worn out with terror and fatigue.

"In the meantime, night approached rapidly, and with the night, my fears increased. I knew not what to do. It seemed as if I were encompassed by unknown dangers, into which I must plunge at every step. Although I had eaten nothing since the evening before, my fears prevented me from feeling hunger.

"No external noise by which I could compute the lapse of time had reached me, but I presumed that it must be about seven or eight in the evening, for we were in the month of October, and it was completely dark.

"Suddenly the noise of a door turning on its hinges startled me; a ball of fire appeared above the window in the ceiling, casting a brilliant light into the room, and I perceived with horror that a man was standing at a few paces from me.

"A table, with two covers, with a supper, all prepared, was arranged, as if by magic, in the middle of the room.

"And this man was he who had pursued me for a year,

who had sworn my dishonor, and who, from the first words which fell from his lips, left me no hope of being at any future time restored to liberty."

"The wretch!" murmured Felton.

"Oh, yes, the wretch!" exclaimed her ladyship, seeing the interest which the young officer, whose soul seemed hanging on her lips, took in the strange tale—"oh, yes! the wretch! He thought that it was quite enough to have carried me off in my sleep; he now came, hoping that I should yield to my shame, since that shame was consummated—he came to offer me his fortune in exchange for my love.

"Everything that a woman's heart can realize of haughty scorn, and of contemptuous speech I poured out upon that man. Undoubtedly he was habituated to such reproaches, for he listened to me with a calm and smiling look, and with his arms folded on his breast; and then, when he thought I had no more to say, he approached to take my hand. I rushed toward the table, seized a knife and placed it to my bosom. 'Take one step more!' I cried, 'and, besides my dishonor, you shall have to answer for my death!'

"Doubtless there was in my look, my voice, my whole appearance, that character of truth which carries conviction into the most wicked minds; for he stopped.

"'Your death!' cried he. 'Oh, no! you are too charming a creature for me to consent to lose you so. Adieu! fair one, I shall wait until you are in a better temper, before I pay you another visit.'

"At these words he whistled; and the flaming globe which illumined my room ascended and disappeared. I found myself once more in total darkness. The same noise of a door opening and shutting was an instant afterwards, again audible; the globe of light descended anew, and I was again alone.

"This moment was frightful. Had I been at all uncertain about my misery, every doubt was now dispelled before this fearful reality. I was now in the power of a man whom I not only detested, but whom I despised—of a man who had already given me a fatal proof of what he dared to do."

"But who was that man?" demanded Felton.

"Her ladyship gave no answer to his question, but continued her tale.

"I spent the night on a chair, starting at the least noise. At about midnight the lamp went out, and I was again in darkness. But the night passed away without any reappearance of my persecutor. Daylight came: the table was gone: and I had still the knife in my hand. This knife was my sole hope.

"I was overwhelmed with fatigue; my eyes were burning from sleepiness; I had not dared to close them for a single instant. Daylight reassured me. I threw myself on my bed, still grasping the protecting knife, which I concealed beneath my pillow.

"When I awoke, another table was arranged. But now, in spite of my terrors, in spite of my agonies, a ravenous hunger made itself felt. For eight-and-forty hours I had tasted no nourishment. I ate some bread and a little fruit. Then, remembering the narcotic, mingled with the water I had drank, I did not touch that which was on the table, but went and filled my glass from a marble reservoir fixed in the wall above my toilet-table.

"And yet, in spite of this precaution, I remained for some time in extreme anguish; but on this occasion my fears were unfounded. I passed the day without experiencing anything that resembled what I feared. I took the precaution, however, to empty the decanter of half the water, that my distrust might not be perceived.

"The evening came ; but, profound as was the darkness, my eyes began to grow accustomed to it. In the midst of this obscurity, I saw the table sink into the floor ; a quarter of an hour afterward, it reappeared, bearing my supper ; a moment later, thanks to the same lamp, my apartment was again lighted.

"I was resolved only to eat of those things with which it was impossible to mingle anything somniferous. Two eggs and some fruit composed my meal, and then I drew a glass of water from my guardian fountain and drank it. After the first mouthfuls it appeared to me no longer to have the same taste as in the morning. A sudden suspicion seized me. I stopped ; but I had already swallowed half a glassful. I threw the remainder away with horror, and waited, with the icy drop of terror on my brow. Some invisible witness had unquestionably seen me take water from the fountain, and had taken advantage of my confidence the more certainly to accomplish my ruin, so coldly planned, so cruelly pursued.

"Half an hour had not passed over before the same symptoms began to reappear. Only, as I had now taken no more than half a glass of water, I struggled longer against them, and instead of sleeping soundly I fell into that kind of slumber which left me the perception of all that passed around me, whilst it quite deprived me of the power of resistance or defense. I dragged myself toward my bed, to seek the sole defense which remained—my guardian knife. But I could not reach the pillow. I fell upon my knees, grasping with my hands one of the posts of the bed."

"Felton became fearfully pale, and a convulsive shudder pervaded all his frame.

"And what was more horrible," continued the lady, her voice trembling as if she felt the anguish of that terrible moment, "was, that, on this occasion I was con-

scious of the danger which hung over me. My soul, if I may so express myself, was watching over my sleeping body. I saw—I heard—as in a dream, it is true; but my perceptions were, on that account, only the more terrific. I saw the lamp again ascending and was gradually left in utter darkness. I then heard the sound of that door, so well known, although it had been opened but twice. I felt instinctively that someone was approaching me. It is said that the wretched beings who are lost in the deserts of America thus feel the approaches of a serpent. I wished to make an effort. I endeavored to cry out. By an incredible exertion of my will, I even raised myself up, but, it was only to fall again—fall into the arms of my persecutor.”

“But tell me, then, who was your persecutor?” exclaimed the young officer.

Her ladyship saw at a glance how deeply she affected Felton, by dwelling on each detail of her narrative; but she did not wish to spare him any torture. The more deeply she wounded his heart, the more surely would he avenge her. So she proceeded once more as if she had not heard his exclamation, or as if she thought that the time for answering it had not yet come.

“Only this time it was not a sort of inanimate corpse with whom the wretch had to deal. I told you that without having recovered the entire use of my faculties I had an idea of my peril. I struggled with all my strength, and though weakened, doubtless opposed a long resistance, and heard him exclaim:

“‘Oh, these miserable Puritans! I knew that they harassed their executioners, but I believed them to be less earnest in resisting their seducers.’

“Alas! this desperate resistance could not last long. I felt my strength leaving me, and this time the villain did not take advantage of my sleep, but of my swoon.”

Felton listened without uttering aught but a sort of roar. The perspiration trickled down his brow; and, with a hand hidden beneath his dress he tore his flesh.

"My first impulse, on returning to myself," continued her ladyship, "was to look under my pillow for the knife, which I had been unable to reach: if it had not served as a defense it might at least be useful for an expiation. But, on taking this knife, Felton, a terrible idea suggested itself to me. I have sworn to tell you everything, and I will do so: I have promised you the truth, and I will tell it, though it should undo me."

"The idea suggested itself to you to revenge yourself on this man, did it not?" exclaimed Felton.

"Well! yes," said her ladyship, "it was as you have guessed. That idea was not becoming in a Christian, I know. Undoubtedly the eternal enemy of our souls himself breathed it into my mind. In fact—how shall I confess it, Felton?" continued her ladyship, in a tone of a woman accusing herself of a crime—"that idea came into my mind, and has never left it since. And, perhaps, my present sufferings are but the punishment of the homicidal thoughts."

"Go on—go on," said Felton; "I long to hear of the accomplishment of your revenge."

"Oh! I determined that it should be delayed as short a time as possible. I doubted not that he would return on the following night. During the day I had nothing to fear. On this account, at breakfast time, I did not hesitate to eat and drink. I was resolved to pretend to sup, but to taste nothing. I must therefore, by the morning's nourishment, prepare myself to bear the evening's fast. I concealed a glass of water from my breakfast, as thirst had been my severest suffering when I remained forty-eight hours without eating or drinking.

"The day passed without producing any other effect

upon me than to strengthen the resolution I had taken. But I took care that my face should not betray the thoughts of my heart; for I doubted not that I was watched. Many times, indeed, I even felt a smile upon my lips. Felton, I dare not tell you the idea at which I smiled—you would abominate me!"

"Go on—go on," said Felton: "you see that I listen to you, and I want to know the end."

"The evening came," continued her ladyship, "and the usual circumstances took place. During the darkness, my supper was served as usual; and then the lamp was lighted, and I placed myself at table. I ate only some fruit, and pretended to pour some water from the decanter, but drank that which I had kept in my own glass: the substitution was, however, so adroitly made that my spies, if I had any, could have no suspicion of the truth. After supper, I exhibited all the appearances of the drowsiness that I had felt the evening before; but this time, as if overwhelmed with fatigue, or as if familiarized with danger, I pretended to fall asleep. I had now found my knife, and, whilst I feigned to sleep, my hand convulsively grasped the handle.

"Two hours glided away, without anything new occurring. On this occasion—oh, my God! who would have predicted that on the previous night!—I actually began to fear that he might fail to come.

"At last I saw the lamp gently rising, and disappearing in the depths of the ceiling. My apartment became dark; but I made an effort to pierce through the gloom. About ten minutes then elapsed, during which I heard nothing but the beating of my own heart. I prayed to heaven that he might come.

"At length I heard the well-known sound of the door opening and shutting; I perceived in spite of the thickness of the carpet, a step which made the floor creak; I

saw, in spite of the darkness, a shadow which approached my couch."

"Make haste! make haste!" interrupted Felton; "do you not see that every one of your words burns me like molten lead!"

"Then," continued her ladyship, "I collected all my strength. I called to mind that the moment of revenge, or rather of justice had now arrived. I looked upon myself as another Judith. I held the knife in my hand; and when I saw him near me, then, with a last cry of grief and of despair, I struck him in the middle of the breast! The wretch! he had foreseen the blow. His breast was covered by a coat of mail: the knife itself was blunted.

"'Ah! ah!' cried he, seizing me by the arm and tearing from me the weapon which had so badly served me; 'you want to kill me, my pretty Puritan: but that is more than hatred—it is ingratitude. Come, come, calm yourself, my charming child. I thought you had grown gentler. I am not one of those tyrants who keep women in opposition to their wills. You do not love me? I had my doubts about it, with my usual folly; now, I am convinced of it. To-morrow you shall be free.'

"I had only one wish, which was that he should kill me.

"'Take care,' said I, for my liberty shall be your disgrace!'

"'Explain yourself, my beautiful sibyl.'

"'Yes, as soon as I am free, I will tell everything. I will proclaim your violence toward me—I will proclaim my captivity—I will denounce this place of infamy. You are greatly exalted, my lord, but tremble! Above you is the king—and above the king is God.'

"However great a command he had over himself, my persecutor allowed an angry gesture to escape him. I could not see the expression of his countenance, but I had

felt the trembling of his arm, on which my hand rested.

“‘Then you shall never leave this place,’ said he.

“‘Right! right!’ I exclaimed: ‘then the site of my punishment shall be also the site of my tomb. Right! I will die here, and you shall see whether an accusing phantom be not even more terrible than the living enemy who threatens.’

“‘But you shall have no weapon?’

“‘There is one, which despair has placed within the reach of every creature who has courage to make use of it—I will die of hunger.’

“‘Come,’ said the wretch, ‘is not peace of more value than such a war? I give you liberty this instant: I will proclaim your virtue, I will call you the Lucretia of England.’

“‘And I will proclaim you the Sextus. I will denounce you before men, as I have already denounced you before God; and if it should be necessary that, like Lucretia, I should attest the accusation with my blood, I will attest it.’

“‘Ah, ah!’ said my enemy, in a tone of mockery, ‘then it is quite another thing. Faith, after all, you are very well off here. You shall want for nothing; and if you allow yourself to die of hunger, it will be your own fault.’

“At these words he left the room. I heard the door open and shut, and remained overwhelmed: not so much, I confess, with grief, as with the shame of having failed in my revenge.

“He kept his word. All the day and all the night of the next day passed without my seeing him; but I kept mine, also, and neither ate nor drank anything. I was resolved, as I had told him, to let myself die of hunger. I spent the day and night in prayer; for I hoped that God would forgive my self-murder. On the second night, the door was opened. I was lying on the floor, for my

strength began to fail me. At the noise, I raised myself upon my hand.

“‘Well,’ said a voice which vibrated on my ear too terribly to be mistaken—‘well, have you become a little more compliant, and will you purchase liberty by a mere promise of silence? Come, I am a good prince,’ added he, ‘and although I do not love the Puritans, I do them justice, as well as to their women, when they are pretty. Come, give me a little oath upon the cross: I ask for nothing more.’

“‘On the cross!’ I exclaimed, raising myself up, for, on hearing that detested voice, I had recovered all my strength. ‘Upon the cross I swear that no promise, no threat, no torture, shall close my lips. Upon the cross I swear to denounce you everywhere, as a murderer, a violator of honor, as a coward. On the cross I swear, if ever I accomplish my escape, to demand vengeance against you from the whole human race!’

“‘Take care!’ said the voice, in a tone of menace that I had not yet heard: ‘I have one expedient, which I will only employ at the last extremity, to stop your mouth; or, at least, to binder any one from believing a syllable of what you say.’

“I rallied all my strength to answer by a laugh of scorn.

“He saw that from this time it was war to the death between us.

“‘Listen,’ said he: I give you the remainder of this night, and to-morrow. Reflect! Promise to be silent; and wealth, consideration, even honor, shall surround you. Threaten to speak, and I condemn you to infamy.’

“‘You?’ I exclaimed, ‘you?’

“‘To eternal, ineffaceable infamy!’

“‘You!’ I repeated. Oh, I assure you, Felton, I believed that he was mad.

“‘ Yes, I !’ he replied.

“‘ Ah, leave me,’ I cried, ‘ leave me, if you do not wish me to dash out my brains against the wall before your eyes.’

“‘ Well,’ said he, ‘ you demand it ? I therefore leave you till to-morrow evening.’

“‘ Till to-morrow evening,’ I replied, sinking on the floor and biting the carpet in my rage.”

Felton supported himself against a chair, and her ladyship saw, with a demoniacal joy, that the fortitude of the young officer would probably give way before the end of her recital.

CHAPTER LVII.

AN EVENT IN CLASSICAL TRAGEDY.

AFTER a moment's silence, which My Lady employed in observing the young officer who was listening to her she continued her story :

"For nearly three days I had neither eaten nor drank," said she, "and I was suffering dreadful tortures. Sometimes a feeling as of passing clouds, which pressed upon my brow and dimmed my sight, came over me; it was delirium. The evening arrived. I was so weak that I fainted every moment, and each time that I fainted I thanked God, for I believed that I was dying. During one of these fainting fits I heard the door open, and terror recalled me to myself. My persecutor entered, followed by a man in a mask. He was himself also masked, but I recognized his step, his voice, and that commanding air which hell has given to his person, for the misfortune of mankind.

"'Well,' said he, 'have you determined to take the oath which I required of you ?'

"'You have yourself said the Puritans are faithful to their word, and you have already heard my resolution—it is, to appeal against you here on earth, to the tribunal of men, and, in heaven, to the tribunal of God.'

"'So, you persist ?'

"'Yes ! I swear it before the God who hears me—I will call the whole world to witness to your wickedness, and will never cease until I have found an avenger.'

"'You are an abandoned woman,' said he, in a voice

of thunder, ‘and you shall suffer the punishment of one! Tainted as you are in the eyes of that world which you invoke, try to prove to it that you are neither guilty nor insane.’

“Then addressing the man who accompanied him, said, ‘Executioner, do your duty!’”

“Oh! his name!” cried Felton, in a new burst of rage; “tell me his name!”

“Then, in spite of cries, in spite of my resistance: for I began to understand that something worse than death was meditated against me, the executioner seized me, threw me on the floor, and bound me so as to wound and bruise me by his violence; and then, while I was suffocated by my sobs, almost senseless, and calling aloud on that God who did not listen to my cries—I uttered suddenly a fearful shriek of agony and shame. A burning instrument, a red-hot iron, the brand of the executioner, had been stamped upon my shoulder!”

Felton groaned.

“Look!” said her ladyship, rising with all the majesty of a queen; “look, Felton, how a new kind of martyrdom has been invented for a pure young girl, the victim of a monster’s brutal crime. Learn to know the hearts of men, and henceforth be more reluctant to become the instrument of their unjust revenge.”

Her ladyship, with a rapid motion, threw open her robe, tore away the cambric which covered her bosom, and crimsoned by pretended rage and simulated shame exposed to the young man the ineffaceable mark which dishonored that beautiful shoulder.

“But,” exclaimed Felton, “it is a fleur-de-lis that I behold!”

“And in that consists the greater infamy,” replied her ladyship.

“The brand of England would have made it necessary

for him to prove from what court the sentence had been issued ; and I should have made a public reference to all the tribunals of the realm : but the brand of France—oh ! by that I was indeed branded ! ”

It was more than Felton could endure. Pale, motionless, petrified by this frightful revelation, dazzled by the superhuman loveliness of that woman, who unveiled herself before him with an immodesty which appeared to him sublime, he fell upon his knees before her, as did the first Christian before those pure and holy martyrs whom the persecution of the emperors delivered, in the Circus, to the sanguinary wantonness of the mob. The mark of infamy disappeared : the beauty alone remained.

“ Forgive me, forgive me ! ” exclaimed Felton ; “ oh, forgive me ! ”

Her ladyship read in his eyes, “ Love ! Love ! ”

“ Forgive you—for what ? ” she inquired.

“ Forgive me for joining myself with your oppressors.”

Her ladyship held out her hand.

“ So beautiful, so young ! ” exclaimed Felton, covering that hand with kisses.

Her ladyship cast upon him one of those glances which convert the slave into a monarch.

Felton, Puritan though he was, relinquished her hand to kiss her feet.

He no longer loved—he now adored her.

When this crisis had passed over—when her ladyship appeared to have resumed the calmness she had never lost :

“ Ah ! ” said he, “ I have now only one thing more to ask of you : it is the name of your true executioner, for, in my opinion, there was only one—the other was an instrument, nothing more.”

“ Brother ! ” exclaimed her ladyship, “ can it be neces-

sary for me now to tell his name? Have you not already guessed it?"

"What!" resumed Felton, "he—again he!—what! the true criminal?"

"The true criminal," said her ladyship, "is the plunderer of England, the persecutor of all true believers, the cowardly destroyer of woman's honor—he who, for a caprice of his polluted heart is about to shed so much of England's blood; who protects the Protestants to-day, and to-morrow will betray them!"

"Buckingham! It is indeed Buckingham!" exclaimed the exasperated Felton.

Her ladyship hid her face in her hands, as if she was unable to endure the shame which that name recalled.

"Buckingham! the executioner of this angelic creature!" exclaimed Felton. "And thou, oh God! hast not smitten him! Thou hast left him, noble, honored, powerful, for the destruction of us all?"

"God abandons him who ceases to be constant to himself," said her ladyship.

"But, surely, he must wish to draw down upon himself the chastisement reserved for the accursed!" continued Felton, with increasing excitement. "Surely he must wish that human vengeance should anticipate the chastisement of Heaven!"

"But men fear, and spare him!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Felton, "I fear him not, neither will I spare him!"

Her ladyship felt her heart bathed in a flood of infernal joy.

"But how," continued Felton, "does Lord de Winter—my protector, my father—come to be concerned in this?"

"Listen, Felton," replied her ladyship. "By the side of the cowardly and contemptible, there are always men of noble, generous natures. I was betrothed to a man

whom I loved, and who loved me; a heart like yours, Felton—a man like you. I went to him, and told him what had taken place. He knew me well, and did not entertain a moment's doubt. He was a nobleman—a man equal in every respect to Buckingham. He spoke not, but he girded on his sword, wrapped his cloak around him, and proceeded to the palace of the duke."

"Yes, yes," said Felton, "I understand: yet, with such men, it is not the sword that should be used, but the dagger."

"Buckingham had departed on the previous evening as ambassador to the court of Spain, where he went to demand the hand of the Infanta for King Charles I., then the Prince of Wales. My lover returned."

"'Listen,' said he; 'this man is gone, and, therefore, for the present, he escapes my vengeance. But, in the meantime, let us be united, as we ought to be; and, then, depend on Lord de Winter to support his own honor and that of his wife.'"

"Lord de Winter!" exclaimed Felton.

"Yes," said her ladyship, "Lord de Winter. And now you understand it all, do you not? Buckingham remained absent nearly a year; eight days before his return, Lord de Winter died suddenly, leaving me his sole heiress. Whence came this blow? God, who sees everything, doubtless knows: as for me, I accuse nobody."

"Oh, what an abyss! what an abyss!" exclaimed Felton.

"Lord de Winter had died without confiding in his brother. The terrible secret was to have been concealed from every one, until it burst like thunder on the guilty duke. Your protector had seen, with pain, this marriage of his brother with a young and portionless girl; and I perceived that I could expect no assistance from a man who was disappointed in his hopes of an inheritance. I went to France, resolved to remain there for the remainder

of my life. But my whole fortune was in England ; and all communications being stopped by the war, I was in want of everything, and was in fact compelled to return. Six days ago, I arrived at Portsmouth."

"Well?" said Felton.

"Well! Buckingham had unquestionably been apprised of my return, and announced it to Lord de Winter, who was already prejudiced against me, and at the same time persuaded him that his sister-in-law was a dissolute and branded woman. The pure and noble voice of my husband was no longer there to defend me. Lord de Winter no doubt believed all that he heard, and the more readily, because it was his interest to believe it. Hence he caused me to be arrested, conveyed here, and placed under your charge. You know the sequel. The day after to-morrow he banishes, he transports me—the day after to-morrow he sends me forth amongst the infamous. Oh! the woof is well woven, the plot is skillfully planned, and my honor will perish in it. You see, Felton, why I must die! Felton, give me the knife!"

At these words, as if all her strength were exhausted, her ladyship sank, weak and languishing, into the arms of the young officer who intoxicated with love, anger, and unknown transports, received her with joy, eagerly pressing his lips to that beautiful mouth and feeling her heart beat against his own.

"No, no!" said he : "no, you shall live—you shall live honored and pure—you shall live to triumph over your enemies!"

Her ladyship gently forced him back with her hand, whilst she attracted him by her look.

"Oh, death! death!" said she, lowering her eyelids and her voice: "death rather than disgrace, Felton, my brother, my friend, I beseech you!"

"No!" exclaimed Felton, "no! you shall live, and you shall be avenged."

"Felton, I bring misfortune upon everything that surrounds me! Felton, desert me—let me die!"

"Well, then, let us die together!" exclaimed he.

Several knocks sounded on the door.

"Listen!" said she: "we have been overheard. They come, and it is ended. We are undone!"

"No," said Felton, "it is the sentinel, who merely lets me know that the guard is about to be relieved."

"Hasten, then to the door, and open it yourself."

Felton, obeyed her. This woman already wholly engrossed his thoughts—she was already mistress of all his soul.

On opening the door he found himself confronted by a sergeant, who commanded a patrol of the guard.

"Well, what is the matter?" demanded the young lieutenant.

"You told me," replied the sentinel, "to open the door if I heard you call for help, but you forgot to leave me the key. I heard you cry out without understanding what you said: I tried to open the door, but it was fastened inside, and therefore I called the sergeant."

"And here I am," said the sergeant.

Felton—wandering, wild, verging on madness—remained speechless.

Her ladyship saw at once that she must release him from his embarrassment. She ran to the table, and seized the knife, which he had placed there.

"And by what right would you prevent my death?" said she.

"Great God!" exclaimed Felton, as he saw the knife glittering in her hand.

At this moment a burst of ironical laughter resounded in the corridor.

The baron, attracted by the noise, stood, in his dressing gown, and with his sword under his arm, upon the threshold of the door.

"Ah, ah!" said he, "here we are at the last act of the tragedy. You see, Felton, the drama has presented all the phases that I indicated. But don't concern yourself—no blood will be spilled."

Her ladyship felt that she was ruined, unless she could give Felton an immediate and terrible proof of her courage.

"You deceive yourself, my lord! Blood will be spilled; and may that blood fall back on those who caused it to flow."

Felton uttered a cry, and rushed towards her; but he was too late—she had dealt the blow.

The knife had, fortunately—we ought to say skillfully—encountered the steel busk, which, defended like a cuirass, the chests of women at that period, and, glancing aside, had torn the robe, and penetrated transversely between the flesh and the ribs. The lady's dress was, nevertheless, instantaneously stained with blood, and she fell back apparently insensible.

Felton snatched away the knife.

"See, my lord," said he, with a gloomy look; "this woman, who was under my guard, has slain herself!"

"Make yourself easy, Felton," replied Lord de Winter; "she is not dead; demons do not die so easily. Make yourself easy, and go and wait for me in my apartment."

"But my lord——"

"Go, I command you!"

At this injunction from his superior, Felton obeyed; but as he went out, he placed the knife in his bosom.

As for Lord de Winter, he contented himself with summoning the woman who waited upon her ladyship; and when she came, having recommended to her care

the prisoner, who was still insensible, he left them together.

Nevertheless, as the wound might, after all, in spite of his suspicions, be serious, he immediately dispatched a man on horseback for a surgeon.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE ESCAPE.

As Lord de Winter had suspected, her ladyship was not very dangerously wounded. As soon, therefore, as she found herself alone with the attendant for whom the baron had sent, and who hastened to undress her, she opened her eyes. It was, however, necessary to counterfeit weakness and pain, and to an actress like her ladyship, this was no difficult matter. So completely, indeed, was this poor woman the dupe of her prisoner, that, in spite of the latter's entreaties, she persisted in watching over her throughout the night.

But the presence of this woman was no impediment to her ladyship's thoughts. There could be no longer any doubt that Felton was convinced—that Felton was hers ; and that, had an angel appeared to the young man to accuse her, he would certainly have taken it, in his present state of mind, for an emissary of the Evil One. Her ladyship smiled at this idea, for Felton was henceforth her only hope, her sole means of safety.

Yet Lord de Winter might have suspected him, and Felton might now, perhaps, himself be watched.

About four o'clock in the morning the surgeon arrived, but her ladyship's wound had already closed. The surgeon therefore could determine neither its direction nor its depth ; but from the pulse of his patient, he concluded that the case was not very serious.

In the morning, under pretence that she had not slept during the night, and needed rest, her ladyship dismissed the woman who had watched beside the bed. She enter-

tained a hope that Felton would visit her at breakfast time. But Felton came not. Had her secret fears been realized? Had Felton been suspected by the baron, and would he fail her, now, at the decisive moment? She had only one remaining day. Lord de Winter had fixed her departure for the twenty-third, and this was the morning of the twenty-second. Nevertheless, she still waited in tolerable patience till the hour of dinner.

Although she had eaten nothing in the morning, her dinner was brought to her at the usual time; and her ladyship then perceived with alarm that the uniform of the soldier who guarded her was changed.

She hazarded a question as to what had become of Felton. The answer was that Felton had departed on horseback an hour before. She inquired whether the baron was still in the castle; and the soldier replied that he was, and had given orders to be called if the prisoner should express a wish to speak to him.

Her ladyship said she was too weak at present, and that her only wish was to remain alone.

The soldier then quitted the room, leaving the dinner on the table.

Felton had been sent away, and the marines who guarded her were changed. It was obvious, therefore, that Felton was distrusted. This was the last blow inflicted on the prisoner.

As soon as she was left alone, her ladyship arose. That bed, to which she had confined herself in order that her wound might be thought serious, scorched her like a burning furnace.

She cast a glance at the door; a board had been nailed over the wicket. The baron, no doubt, feared that she might, through this opening, still find some diabolical means of seducing her guards. Her ladyship smiled with

joy. She could now give way to her emotions without observation. She roamed about her chamber with all the violence of a raging lunatic, or of a tigress imprisoned in her iron cage. Had the knife still been there, she would certainly have resolved to kill, not herself, but the baron.

At six o'clock Lord de Winter entered. He was armed to the very teeth. This man, in whom her ladyship had hitherto seen only a rather insignificant gentleman, had now become an inexorable jailer. He seemed to foresee everything, to conjecture everything, to anticipate everything. A single glance at her ladyship told him what was passing in her soul.

"So," said he, "you will not kill me to-day, for you are without a weapon: and, moreover, I am on my guard. You had begun to corrupt my poor Felton: he has already felt your infernal influence, but I wish to save him, and you shall see him no more. It is all ended now: you may collect your clothes, for to-morrow you will set out. I had fixed the embarkation for the 24th, but I have reflected that the sooner it takes place the surer it will be. By twelve o'clock to-morrow I shall receive the order for your banishment, signed by Buckingham. If you say one single word to any one whatever, before you are on board the vessel, my sergeant will blow out your brains: he has received his orders so to do. If, when on board, you speak to any one without the captain's permission, the captain will have you cast into the sea. This is all settled. And now, farewell till our next meeting; I have nothing more to say to you to-day. I shall see you again to-morrow, to take leave of you."

At these words the baron left the room.

Her ladyship had listened to this threatening tirade with a smile of scorn upon her lips, but with fury in her heart.

The supper was brought in. Her ladyship felt that she needed strength, for she knew not what might be the events of that night, which was now approaching in gloom. Huge clouds were already sweeping across the skies, and distant flashes announced a tempest. About ten o'clock the storm burst forth; and her ladyship found some consolation in seeing nature partake of the commotion in her own breast. The thunder roared like the angry passions in her soul; and it seemed to her as if the passing gusts disturbed her brow, as they did the trees whose branches they bent down, and whose leaves they swept off. She howled like the tempest, but her voice was unheard in the vast voice of nature, which also seemed to be moaning in despair.

Suddenly she heard something strike against the window; and by the light of the gleaming flash, she saw the countenance of a man appear behind its bars. She ran to the window and opened it.

"Felton!" she exclaimed, "I am saved!"

"Yes," said Felton, "but silence! silence! I must have time to saw your bars, only be careful that we are not seen through the wicket."

"Oh! it is a token that the Lord is on our side. Felton," replied her ladyship; "they have closed up the wicket with a board."

"Good!" said Felton. "Our God has deprived them of their senses."

"But what must I do?" inquired her ladyship.

"Nothing—nothing! only shut your window. Go to bed: or, at any rate, lie down with your clothes on: and when I have finished I shall tap on the glass. But will you be able to accompany me?"

"Oh, yes!"

"But your wound?"

"Pains me, but does not prevent me walking."

“Be ready, then, at the first signal.”

Her ladyship closed the window, put out her lamp, as Felton had advised, and threw herself upon the bed. Amidst the raging of the storm, she heard the grating of the file against the bars, and by the light of every flash she beheld the form of Felton behind the glass.

She passed an hour in almost breathless suspense : icy drops stood upon her brow : and at every sound that issued from the corridor, her heart was convulsed with frightful agony. There are hours which seem prolonged into years. At the expiration of this time, Felton again tapped. Her ladyship bounded from her bed, and opened the window : the removal of two bars had formed an opening large enough to admit a man.

“Are you ready?” demanded Felton.

“Yes. Must I carry anything away with me?”

“Gold, if you have any.”

“Fortunately, they have left me what I had.”

“So much the better; for I have used all mine in chartering a vessel.”

“Here!” said her ladyship, placing in Felton’s hand a bag of gold.

Felton took the bag, and threw it to the foot of the wall.

“Now,” said he, “will you come?”

“Here I am.”

Her ladyship mounted on a chair, and passed the upper part of her body through the window. She saw the young officer suspended over the abyss by a ladder of ropes. For the first time a sentiment of fear reminded her that she was a woman. The void terrified her.

“I was afraid it would be so,” said Felton.

“It is nothing—it is nothing,” exclaimed her ladyship.
“I will descend with my eyes shut.”

“Have you confidence in me?”

"Need you ask me!"

"Then put your two hands together, and cross them. That's right."

Felton fastened her two wrists together with his handkerchief, and then bound a cord about them.

"What are you doing?" demanded her ladyship, in surprise.

"Place your arms around my neck, and do not be afraid."

"But I shall make you lose your balance, and we shall both be dashed to pieces."

"Do not be alarmed; I am a sailor."

There was not a moment to be lost. Her ladyship passed her arms around Felton's neck, and allowed herself to glide through the window.

Felton began to descend the ladder slowly, step by step. In spite of the weight of the two bodies, the blast of the hurricane rocked them in the air. Suddenly Felton paused.

"What is the matter?" demanded her ladyship.

"Silence!" said Felton, "I hear footsteps."

"We are discovered!"

There was silence for a few moments.

"No," said Felton, "it is nothing."

"But what is that noise?"

"It is the patrol, who are about to pass on their round."

"And where do they pass?"

"Immediately beneath us."

"Then we shall be discovered."

"No, if there should be no lightning."

"They will strike against the bottom of the ladder."

"Fortunately it is too short by six feet."

"There they are! My God!"

"Silence!"

They both remained suspended—motionless, scarcely

venturing to breathe, at a height of twenty feet above the ground, whilst the soldiers passed laughing and talking beneath them. It was a fearful moment for the fugitives! The patrol passed by. They heard the sound of their retreating steps, and the murmur of their voices, which gradually became weaker in the distance.

“Now,” said Felton, “we are saved!”

Her ladyship breathed a sigh, and fainted.

Felton continued to descend. Having reached the bottom of the ladder, and finding no further support for his feet, he now descended with his hands, until he clung to the last step, when, hanging by the strength of his wrists, he found that his feet touched the ground. He picked up the bag of gold, which he took between his teeth; and raising her ladyship in his arms, retreated rapidly in a direction opposite to that which the patrol had taken. Leaving the line of the guard, he plunged down amidst the rocks; and, when he had reached the sea-shore, he whistled. His signal was answered in a similar manner; and, five minutes afterward a boat appeared, manned by four men.

The boat came near, but the water was too shallow for it to reach the shore. Felton waded into the sea up to his waist, not wishing to intrust his precious burden to any other hands. Fortunately the tempest was beginning to abate, although the sea was still rough. The little boat bounded on the waves like a nutshell.

“To the sloop!” said Felton, “and pull quickly.”

The four men bent themselves to their work; but the sea was too heavy for their oars to make much headway. Nevertheless they began to leave the castle behind them; and that was the principal aim. The night was profoundly dark, and it was almost impossible for them to perceive the shore; much less would any one upon the shore be able to perceive their boat. A black speck was rocking on the sea. It was the sloop.



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Whilst the boat was advancing toward it with all the strength of its four oarsmen, Felton unbound the cord and the handkerchief which confined her ladyship's hands. Then, when her hands were once more free, he took some sea-water, and sprinkled it upon her face. Her ladyship heaved a sigh, and opened her eyes.

"Where am I?" said she.

"Saved," replied the young officer.

"Oh! saved! saved!" exclaimed she. "Yes, I see the heavens and the ocean. This air which I breathe is that of liberty! Ah!—Thanks, Felton, thanks!"

The young man pressed her to his heart.

"But what is the matter with my hands!" asked her ladyship; "my wrists feel as though they had been crushed in a vise."

She lifted up her arms; her wrists were indeed bruised.

"Alas!" said Felton, looking at those beautiful hands, with a melancholy shake of the head.

"Oh! it is nothing—it is nothing!" exclaimed her ladyship. "I remember now."

Her ladyship looked around her.

"It is there," said Felton, pointing to the bag of gold.

They neared the sloop. The seamen on watch hailed the boat from which an answer was returned.

"What vessel is this?" demanded her ladyship.

"The one I have chartered for you."

"And whither will it take me?"

"Wheresoever you please, after you have landed me at Portsmouth."

"What have you to do at Portsmouth?" demanded her ladyship.

"To execute the orders of Lord de Winter," said Felton, with a gloomy smile.

"What orders?" inquired her ladyship.

"Do you not understand, then?" replied Felton.

"No; explain yourself, I beseech you."

"As he distrusted me, he determined to guard you himself; and sent me in his stead to procure Buckingham's signature to the order for your transportation."

"But, if he suspected you, how came he to intrust you with this order?"

"He supposed me ignorant of its purport, as he had told me nothing respecting it. I had, however, received my information from you."

"True! And you are going to Portsmouth?"

"I have no time to lose; to-morrow is the twenty-third, and Buckingham departs to-morrow with the fleet."

"Departs to-morrow! Where is he going?"

"To La Rochelle?"

"He must not go!" exclaimed her ladyship, forgetting her habitual presence of mind.

"You may rest easy," replied Felton, "he will not go!"

Her ladyship trembled with delight. She had just penetrated the most secret depths of the young man's heart, and had there seen the death of Buckingham ineffaceably registered.

"Felton," whispered she, "you are as great as Judas Maccabeus. Should you die, I die with you! I can say no more."

"Hush!" said Felton, "we have reached the vessel."

They were, in fact, beside the sloop. Felton ascended the ladder, and gave his hand to her ladyship, whilst the sailors supported her, for the sea was still agitated. In a moment afterward they were upon the deck.

"Captain," said Felton, "here is the lady of whom I spoke to you. You must take her, safe and sound, to France."

"For a thousand pistoles," replied the captain.

"I have already paid you five hundred."

"True," said the captain.

"And here are the other five hundred," added her ladyship, putting her hand to the bag of gold.

"No," said the captain, "I have but one word, and that I gave to this young man. The other five hundred pistoles are not my due until we reach Boulogne."

"And shall we reach there?"

"Safe and sound," replied the captain, "as sure as my name is Jack Butler."

"Well!" said her ladyship, "if you keep your word, instead of five hundred, I will give you a thousand pistoles."

"Hurrah for you, then, my lovely lady!" exclaimed the captain, "and may fortune often send me such passengers as your ladyship."

"In the meantime," said Felton, "run into Chichester Bay, near Portsmouth. You remember that it was agreed you should take us there?"

The captain replied by issuing orders for the necessary evolutions, and, toward seven o'clock in the morning, the little vessel came to in the appointed bay.

During the passage Felton related everything to her ladyship: how, instead of going to London, he had chartered this little vessel; how he had returned; how he had scaled the wall by placing, in the interstices of the stones, as he went up, cramp irons to support his feet; and how at last, having reached the bars of her window, he had secured the ladder to them. Her ladyship knew the rest.

On her side, her ladyship endeavored to encourage Felton in his design; but at the first word she uttered, she clearly perceived that it was necessary rather to moderate than to excite the young fanatic.

It was agreed that her ladyship should wait for Felton

until ten o'clock ; and if he had not returned by that hour she was to set out.

In the latter case, and supposing him to be afterward at liberty, he was to join her in France, at the Carmelite Convent of Bethune.

CHAPTER LIX.

WHAT HAPPENED AT PORTSMOUTH ON THE TWENTY-THIRD
OF AUGUST, 1628.

FELTON took leave of My Lady, as a brother who is going out for a simple walk takes leave of his sister, by kissing her hand. His whole manners and appearance indicated a state of ordinary tranquillity; except that a strange gleam, like the brilliancy of fever, beamed from his eyes. His forehead was even paler than usual; his teeth firmly closed; and his speech had a short and abrupt tone, which seemed to denote that his thoughts were intent upon some gloomy purpose.

As long as he remained in the boat which took him on shore, he had kept his face turned toward her ladyship, who, standing on the deck, followed him with her eyes. Neither of them now entertained much fear of being pursued. Her ladyship's apartment was never entered before nine o'clock in the morning, and it took some hours to travel from the castle to London.

Felton set foot on land, climbed the rising ground, which led to the top of the cliff, saluted her ladyship for the last time, and took his way toward the town. After a hundred steps, as the path turned downwards, he could no longer see more than the mast of the vessel.

He hastened as fast as possible in the direction of Portsmouth, whose towers and houses could be seen about half a mile off through the morning mist. Beyond the town the sea was covered with innumerable ships, whose masts, like a forest of poplars stripped of their leaves by winter, bent before the breath of the wind.

During this rapid walk Felton reviewed in his mind all the accusations, whether true or false, with which two years of ascetic meditation, and long intercourse with the puritans, had furnished him against the royal favorite. When he compared the public crimes of this minister—crimes which were notorious, and, in a manner, European—with those private and unknown ones of which her ladyship had accused him, Felton found that the most guilty of the two beings whom Buckingham united in himself was the one whose life was hidden from the world. His own love, so singular, fresh and ardent, made him see the infamous and imaginary accusation of her ladyship, as one sees through a microscope, the atoms of an insect, otherwise imperceptible, attaining the proportions of frightful monsters. The rapidity of his progress, also, inflamed his blood. The idea that he left behind him, exposed to a dreadful vengeance, the woman whom he loved, or, rather, adored as a saint—his past emotions, and his present fatigue—all tended to excite and elevate his soul above the feelings of humanity.

On entering Portsmouth at about eight o'clock in the morning he found the whole population in motion. The drums were beating in the streets and in the harbor, and the troops about to be embarked were descending toward the sea. Felton arrived at the Admiralty-house, covered with dust, and wet with perspiration. His usually pale face was purple with heat and anger. The sentinel wished to repulse him, but Felton called for the officer on guard, and drew from his pocket the letter which he carried.

"An express from Lord de Winter," said he.

At the name of Lord de Winter, who was known to be one of Buckingham's most intimate friends, the officer gave an order for the admission of Felton, who, moreover, himself wore the uniform of a naval officer.

Felton rushed into the house, but the moment he reached

the hall another man also entered, covered with dust, and out of breath ; having left at the door a post-horse, which on reaching there had fallen on its knees. Both individuals addressed Patrick, the duke's confidential valet, at the same moment. Felton named the Baron de Winter. The stranger refused to mention any name, and declared that he could make himself known to no one but the duke. Each insisted on being admitted before the other. Patrick, who knew that Lord de Winter was connected, both by business and friendship, with his grace, gave the preference to him who came in his name. The other was obliged to wait, and it was easy enough to see how heartily he cursed the delay.

The valet conducted Felton through a large room, in which were waiting the deputies from La Rochelle, led by the Prince de Soubise, and introduced him into a cabinet, where Buckingham, having just left the bath, was finishing his toilet, to which now, as ever, he gave much attention.

" Lieutenant Felton," said Patrick, " from Lord de Winter."

" From Lord de Winter ? " repeated Buckingham.
" Show him in."

Felton entered. At this moment Buckingham threw upon a sofa a rich dressing-gown, brocaded with gold, and put on a doublet of blue velvet, entirely embroidered with pearls.

" Why did not the baron come himself ? " demanded Buckingham. " I expected him this morning."

" He desired me to inform your grace," replied Felton, " that he very much regretted not having that honor ; but that he was prevented by the watch which he is obliged to keep at the castle."

" Yes, yes," said Buckingham ; " I know that : he has a lady prisoner there."

"It is, in fact, about that prisoner that I wish to speak to your grace," replied Felton.

"Well, proceed."

"What I have to say to you, my lord, must be heard by yourself alone."

"Leave us, Patrick," said Buckingham, "but keep within hearing; I shall call you presently."

Patrick left the room.

"We are alone sir," said Buckingham. "Speak."

"My lord," replied Felton, "the Baron de Winter lately wrote to your grace requesting you to sign an order for the transportation of a young woman, named Charlotte Backson."

"Yes, sir; and I replied, that he should either bring or send me the order, and I would sign it."

"Here it is, my lord."

"Give it me," said the duke.

Taking the paper from Felton's hands, his grace cast a rapid glance over its contents. Then, perceiving it was really that which had been referred to, he laid it on the table, took a pen, and prepared to sign it.

"Pardon me, my lord," said Felton, interrupting the duke, "but is your grace aware that Charlotte Backson is not the real name of this young woman?"

"Yes, sir, I know it," replied the duke, dipping his pen into the ink.

"Then your grace is acquainted with her real name?" demanded Felton, in an abrupt tone.

"I do know it."

The duke put the pen to the paper. Felton became pale.

"And, knowing this true name," resumed Felton, "will your grace still sign the paper?"

"Certainly," said Buckingham, "and rather twice than once."

"I cannot believe," continued Felton, in a voice which became more and more abrupt and reproachful, "that your grace is aware that this refers to Lady de Winter?"

"I am perfectly aware of it, although I am astonished that it should be known to you."

"And your grace will sign this order without remorse?"

Buckingham looked haughtily at the speaker.

"Do you happen to know, sir," said he, "that you are asking me some strange questions, and that I am very foolish to answer them?"

"Answer them, my lord!" said Felton; "your position is perhaps more serious than you suppose."

Buckingham thought that as the young man came from Lord de Winter, he probably spoke in his name: he therefore restrained himself.

"Without any remorse whatever," said he; "and the baron knows, as well as I do, that her ladyship is a great criminal, to whom it is almost a favor to limit her punishment to transportation."

The duke again put his pen to the paper.

"You shall not sign that order, my lord," said Felton, making a step toward the duke.

"I shall not sign this order?" exclaimed Buckingham; "and why not?"

"Because you will consult your own conscience, and will render justice to the lady."

"It would be nothing more than justice, if she were sent to Tyburn," said the duke: "her ladyship is an infamous creature."

"My lord, her ladyship is an angel! You know it well, and I demand her liberty."

"Ah?" said Buckingham, "are you mad, thus to speak to me?"

"Excuse me, my lord; I speak as I can—I restrain my-

self. Yet, my lord, think of what you are about to do; beware lest you should overfill the measure——”

“What does he mean?—God forgive me,” exclaimed Buckingham. “I verily believe he threatens me!”

“No, my lord—I implore you still, and I warn you—one drop of water is sufficient to make a full vase overflow—a slight fault is sufficient to draw down vengeance upon the head which has been spared to this day, in spite of so many crimes.”

“Mr. Felton,” said Buckingham, “you will leave this room, and immediately place yourself under an arrest.”

“And you, my lord, will hear me to the end. You have seduced this young girl, you have outraged and polluted her. Repair your crimes toward her, let her depart freely, and I will exact nothing more of you.”

“You will *exact* nothing more!” cried Buckingham, looking at Felton with astonishment, and dwelling on each syllable of the words which he had just pronounced.

“My lord,” continued Felton, becoming more excited as he spoke, “my lord, be careful: the whole of England is wearied by your iniquities; my lord, you have abused the royal power, which you have almost usurped; my lord, you are an abomination to God and man. God will punish you hereafter, and I will punish you now.”

“Ah! This is rather too much!” exclaimed Buckingham, making a step toward the door.

Felton barred the way.

“I humbly entreat you,” said he, “to sign an order for the liberation of Lady de Winter. Reflect that she is the woman whom you have dishonored.”

“Leave the room, sir!” said Buckingham, “or I will call my servants to expel you!”

“You will not call them,” replied Felton, throwing himself between the duke and the bell, which was placed

upon a stand inlaid with silver ; “ take care, my lord, for you are now in God’s hands ! ”

“ In the devil’s hands, you mean ! ” exclaimed Buckingham, elevating his voice so as to attract the attention of those without, but not exactly calling them.

“ Sign, my lord—sign the liberation of Lady de Winter ! ” said Felton, pushing a paper toward the duke.

“ By force ? You are making a fool of yourself ! Hallo, there ! Patrick ! ”

“ Sign, my lord ! ”

“ Never ! ”

“ Never ? ”

“ Help ! ” cried the duke, at the same time leaping toward his sword.

But Felton did not give him time to draw it ; the open knife with which her ladyship had wounded herself was concealed under his doublet, and in one bound he was upon the duke.

At that moment Patrick entered the room, exclaiming :

“ My lord a letter from France ”

“ From France ! ” cried Buckingham, forgetting everything as he imagined from whom that letter came.

Felton took advantage of the moment, and buried the knife up to its handle in his side.

“ Ah, traitor ! ” exclaimed Buckingham, “ thou hast slain me ! ”

“ Murder ! ” shouted Patrick.

Felton cast his eyes around, and, seeing the door free, he rushed into the adjoining room, in which as we have said the deputies from La Rochelle were waiting, passed through it still running, and hurried toward the staircase. But, upon the first step, he met Lord de Winter, who—on seeing him wild-looking, livid, and with blood stains upon the hands and face, rushed upon him, and exclaimed :

"I knew it!—I foresaw it! One minute too late. Alas, alas! unfortunate that I am!"

Felton did not attempt to resist, and Lord de Winter handed him over to the guards, who, in the meantime, conducted him to a little terrace overlooking the sea. His lordship himself hastened into Buckingham's cabinet.

On hearing the duke's cry, and Patrick's shout, the man whom Felton had met in the ante-chamber rushed into his grace's room. He found the duke reclining on a sofa, pressing the wound with his convulsive hand.

"*Laporte*," said the duke, in a dying voice—"Laporte, do you come from her?"

"Yes, your grace," replied the faithful servant of Anne of Austria, "but I fear I come too late."

"Hush! Laporte—you might be overheard. Patrick, let no one enter. Oh, I shall not know what she says to me. My God! I am dying!"

The duke fainted.

Nevertheless, Lord de Winter, the deputies, the chiefs of the expedition, and the officers of Buckingham's household, had already forced their way into the room. The tidings which had filled the house with lamentations and groans, soon spread, and became generally known throughout the town; whilst the firing of a cannon announced that something new and unexpected had occurred.

Lord de Winter tore his hair. "One minute too late!" exclaimed he. "One minute too late! Oh, my God! my God! what a misfortune!"

He had, in fact, at seven o'clock in the morning, received information that a rope-ladder had been found suspended from one of the windows of the castle; and instantly hastening to her ladyship's chamber, he had found it empty, the window open, and the bars filed through. Remembering, then, the verbal warning which D'Artagnan had sent to him through his messenger, he had trembled

for the duke; and without a moment's delay he had mounted the first horse he found, and galloped at full speed to Portsmouth, dismounted in the courtyard, and hastily ascended the staircase where, as we have already said, he encountered Felton on the topmost step.

But the duke was not yet dead. He recovered his senses, again unclosed his eyes, and hope revisited all their hearts.

"Gentlemen," said he, "leave me alone with Patrick and Laporte. Ah, is it you, De Winter? You sent me a strange madman this morning! See the state in which he has placed me!"

"Oh, my lord!" exclaimed the baron—"oh, my lord, never shall I forgive myself for it!"

"And there you would be wrong, De Winter," said Buckingham, giving him his hand. "I know not of any man who is worthy to be regretted by another throughout the whole of his life. But leave us, I beseech you!"

The baron left the room sobbing.

There remained in the cabinet only the wounded duke, Laporte and Patrick. A surgeon had been sent for, but could not be found.

"You will live, my lord—you will live!" repeated the messenger of Anne of Austria, who was kneeling before the duke's sofa.

"What has she written to me?" said Buckingham, feebly, as the blood gushed from him, and he subdued, in order to speak of her he loved, his enormous pains: "what has she written to me? Read me her letter."

"Oh, my lord!" exclaimed Laporte.

"Well, Laporte, do you not see that I have no time to lose?"

Laporte instantly broke the seal, and placed the parchment before the duke's eyes; but Buckingham in vain attempted to decipher the writing.

"Read it, then," said he; "read it—read quickly; for I

can no longer see! Read it—for I shall soon be no longer able to hear, and shall die without knowing what she has written to me."

Laporte no longer hesitated. The letter was as follows:

"MY LORD,—By all that I have suffered through you, and for you, since I have known you, I conjure you if you have any regard for my peace to put an end to those vast preparations which you are making against France, and to cease a war, of which, it is said, religion is the avowed, and your love for me the secret cause. That war may not only bring great calamities to France and England, but even upon yourself, my lord—misfortunes for which I could never be consoled. Be watchful over your own life, which is threatened, and which will be dear to me, from the moment when I shall not be obliged to consider you as an enemy. Yours, affectionately, ANNE."

Buckingham roused all his fast-failing energies to listen to this letter: and when it was ended as if he had experienced a bitter disappointment:

"And have you nothing more to tell me—no verbal message, Laporte?" demanded he.

"Yes, my lord: the queen charged me to tell you to be upon your guard, for she had been warned that you were to be assassinated!"

"And is that all—is that all?" resumed Buckingham, impatiently. "She also bade me tell you that she still loved you."

"Ah!" said Buckingham. "God be praised! My death, then, will not be to her as the death of a stranger!"

* "Patrick," continued the duke, "bring me the casket which contained the diamond studs."

Patrick brought the object he demanded, which Laporte recognised as having belonged to the queen.

"Now the white satin bag on which her initials are embroidered in pearls."

Patrick again obeyed.

"Here, Laporte," said Buckingham, "here are the only tokens which I have received from her—this silver casket and these two letters. You will restore them to her majesty; and, for a last memorial"—he looked around him for some precious object—"you will join with them—"

He still strove to find some gift; but his eyes, dimmed by death, encountered nothing but the knife which had fallen from Felton's hand, with the crimson blood still reeking on its blade.

"And you will join with them this knife," said the duke, pressing Laporte's hand.

He was still able to place the satin bag in the casket, and to drop the knife upon it, as he made a sign to Laporte that he could no longer speak. Then, in a last convulsion, against which he was no longer able to contend, he glided from the sofa to the floor.

Patrick uttered a loud cry.

Buckingham endeavored to smile once more, but death arrested the thought, which remained engraven on his forehead and lips like a last farewell of love.

At this moment the duke's surgeon arrived, completely bewildered. He had already repaired on board the admiral's ship, from whence he had been so hastily summoned. He approached the duke, took his hand, which he held for a moment in his own, and then let it fall again.

"It is all in vain," said he—"he is dead!"

"Dead! dead!" exclaimed Patrick.

At this cry the whole crowd re-entered the apartment, and there was nothing to be seen but consternation and confusion.

As soon as Lord de Winter knew that Buckingham had expired, he ran to Felton, whom the soldiers still guarded on the terrace.

"Wretch!" said he to the young man, who, since Buckingham's death, had recovered that tranquillity and coolness which were never more to abandon him—"wretch, what have you done?"

"I have avenged myself!" he replied.

"Yourself!" cried the baron: "say, rather, that you have been the instrument of that cursed woman: but, I swear to you, that it shall be her last crime."

"I do not know what you mean," replied Felton, calmly, "and I am quite ignorant of what woman you are speaking, my lord. I have killed the Duke of Buckingham, because he twice refused to make me a captain at your request. I have punished him for his injustice—nothing more."

De Winter looked, in his astonishment, at the men who were binding Felton, and knew not what to think of such insensibility.

One single idea, however, still left a cloud upon Felton's brow. At every step that he heard, the simple puritan thought he recognized the step and voice of her ladyship, who had come to throw herself into his arms, and to accuse herself, and perish with him.

Suddenly he started. His glance was fixed upon a point in the sea, which the terrace where he stood completely overlooked. With the eagle eye of a sailor, he had discovered there, where another could only have seen a seagull balancing itself above the waves, the sail of a sloop, which was bearing on towards the shores of France. He grew pale, pressed his hand upon his heart, which was breaking, and at once comprehended the whole extent of the treachery.

"Grant me one last favor?" said he to the baron.

“What is it?” demanded the latter.

“What is the hour?”

The baron drew out his watch. “It wants ten minutes to nine,” said he.

Her ladyship had anticipated the time of her departure by an hour and a half. As soon as she heard the cannon which announced the fatal event, she had ordered the anchor to be weighed.

The boat was now visible, under a blue sky, at a great distance from the shore.

“It was God’s will!” said Felton, with the resignation of a fanatic, but still unable to tear his eyes from that bark, on board of which he doubtless believed that he could distinguish the fair vision of her for whom he was about to sacrifice his life.

De Winter followed his glances, scrutinized his emotions, and comprehended all that had occurred.

“Be punished *alone* first, wretch!” said his lordship to Felton, who allowed himself to be dragged away, with his eyes still turned towards the sea: “but I swear to you, by the memory of my brother, whom I so truly loved, that your accomplice is not saved.”

Felton held down his head without uttering a word.

As for De Winter, he hastily descended the stairs, and betook himself to the harbor.

CHAPTER LX.

IN FRANCE.

THE first apprehension of the King of England, Charles I., on hearing of the Duke of Buckingham's death, was that such fearful news might discourage the Rochellois : hence he endeavored, says Richelieu in his memoirs, to conceal it from them as long as possible, closing all the ports of his kingdom, and being scrupulously careful that no vessel should leave until after the departure of the army which Buckingham had been preparing, and the embarkation of which he now undertook to superintend in person. He even enforced this order with so much strictness as to detain in England the Danish ambassador, who had already taken leave ; and the ambassador from Holland, who was to conduct to Flushing those Dutch Indiamen of which Charles had procured the restitution.

But as the king had not thought of issuing this order until five hours after the event, that is to say, at two o'clock in the afternoon, two ships had already left the port : one bearing, as we know, her ladyship, who, already suspecting what had happened, was confirmed in her belief by seeing the black flag unfolding itself from the mast of the admiral's ship.

As for the second vessel, we shall hereafter be told whom it carried, and how it got away.

During the interval, nothing extraordinary had occurred at the camp before La Rochelle ; except that the king, who was weary as usual, and perhaps more so at the

camp than elsewhere, resolved to go *incognito* to enjoy the *fêtes* of Saint Louis at Saint Germain, and requested the cardinal to provide for him an escort of twenty musketeers. The cardinal, who sometimes caught the weariness of the king, willingly gave this leave of absence to his royal lieutenant, who promised to return by the twelfth of September.

When M. de Treville was informed of this journey by his eminence, he prepared his baggage; and as, without knowing the cause, he was fully aware of the earnest desire, or rather the imperious necessity, that the four friends had for visiting Paris, he marked them out as part of the escort. The four young men received the intelligence a quarter of an hour after M. de Treville, and were the very first persons to whom he communicated it; and then it was that D'Artagnan fully appreciated the favor which the cardinal had conferred upon him in promoting him to the musketeers; as but for that circumstance, he would have been compelled to remain at the camp, whilst his companions departed.

This anxiety to return to Paris was occasioned by the danger which Madame Bonancieux was likely to incur from meeting her mortal enemy, Lady de Winter, at the convent of Bethune. Thus, as we have said, Aramis had written immediately to Marie Michon—that seamstress of Tours who had such exalted acquaintances—that she might solicit from the queen an order empowering Madame Bonancieux to leave the convent, and to take refuge in either Lorraine or Belgium. The answer was not long delayed, for in eight or ten days Aramis had received this letter:

“ **MY DEAR COUSIN,**—I send the order empowering our little servant to withdraw from the Convent of Bethune, the air of which you do not think beneficial to her. My

sister sends you this order with great pleasure, for she is much attached to this little girl, whom she hopes to benefit in the end. I embrace you.

“ MARIE MICHON.”

To this letter was appended an order in these terms:

“ The superior of the Convent of Bethune will deliver into the hands of the bearer of this note the novice who entered the convent under my recommendation and patronage.

ANNE.

“ At the Louvre, August 10, 1628.”

It may be well imagined how much this relationship between Aramis and a seamstress at Tours, who called the queen her sister, enlivened the young men; but Aramis, after having two or three times blushed up to the whites of his eyes at the coarse jokes of Porthos, had begged his friends not again to mention the subject, declaring that if another word was said about it, he would not again employ his cousin as an agent in affairs of the kind.

So nothing more about Marie Michon was said between the four musketeers, who had, moreover, obtained what they wanted—the order to draw Madame Bonancieux from the Convent of Bethune. It is true that this order would be of no great advantage to them whilst they continued in the camp at La Rochelle—that is to say, at the other extremity of France. D'Artagnan was about to ask leave of absence of M. de Treville, confiding to him plainly how important it was that he should depart, when the intelligence was sent to him, as well as to his three companions, that the king was about to proceed to Paris with an escort of twenty musketeers, of which they were to form a part. Great was their joy. Their servants were

sent forward with the baggage, and they themselves set out on the sixteenth in the morning.

The cardinal attended the king from Surgeres to Mauzé, where the king and his minister took leave of each other with great professions of friendship. Nevertheless, the king, although he traveled very fast, for he wished to reach Paris by the twenty-third, was so anxious for amusement, that he halted, from time to time, to hunt the magpie—a pastime for which he had acquired a taste from De Luynes, the first husband of Madame de Chevreuse, and for which he had preserved a great predilection. Sixteen of the twenty musketeers much enjoyed this sport when it occurred; but four of them cursed it most heartily. D'Artagnan more especially had a perpetual humming in his ears, which Porthos thus explained:

"A woman of the higher rank assured me that it is a sign that some one is talking about you somewhere."

On the night of the twenty-third, the escort at length passed through Paris. The king thanked M. de Treville, and allowed him to grant four days leave of absence to his men, on condition that not one of the favored individuals should appear at any public place, under pain of the Bastile.

The first four leaves were granted, as may be imagined, to our four friends; and, more than that, Athos persuaded M. de Treville to extend it to six days instead of four, and managed to put two more nights into these six days; for they set off on the twenty-fourth, at five o'clock in the evening, and M. de Treville had the complaisance to post-date the leave on the morning of the twenty-fifth.

"Oh, good heavens!" said D'Artagnan, who, as we are well aware, never foresaw difficulty, "it appears to me that we are making a great disturbance about a very simple matter. In two days, by killing two or three horses, which I should not care about, for I have plenty of money.

I could be at Bethune. I should then deliver the queen's letter to the abbess, and could bring back the dear treasure which I am seeking—not to Lorraine, not to Belgium, but to Paris, where she might be more securely concealed, particularly whilst the cardinal remains at La Rochelle.

“Then, when the campaign is once ended, partly through the protection of her cousin and partly through what we have ourselves personally done for her, we shall obtain from the queen whatever we desire. Remain, therefore, here; do not uselessly fatigue yourselves. I and Planchet will be quite sufficient for so simple an expedition.”

To this, Athos quietly replied :

“And we, also, have got some money: for I have not quite yet drunk out the remains of the diamond, and Porthos and Aramis have not quite eaten it up. So we may as well founder four horses as one. But remember, D'Artagnan,” he added, in a voice so sad that his accent made the young man shudder—“remember that Bethune is a town where the cardinal has made an appointment with a woman, who, wherever she goes, brings misfortune with her. If you had only four men to deal with, D'Artagnan, I would let you go alone. But you have to deal with this woman, so let all four of us go; and God grant that, with our four valets, we may be in sufficient number.”

“You quite terrify me, Athos!” exclaimed D'Artagnan: “what then do you dread?”

“Everything!” replied Athos.

D'Artagnan looked into the countenances of his companions, which, like that of Athos, bore the impress of profound anxiety: and they continued their journey at the utmost speed of their horses, but without uttering another word.

On the evening of the twenty-sixth, as they were enter-

ing Arras, and just as D'Artagnan had dismounted at the tavern of the Golden Harrow, to drink a glass of wine, a cavalier came out of the yard of the posting house, where he had just changed his horse, and proceeded at full gallop on the road to Paris. At the moment that he issued from the great gate in the street, the wind opened the cloak in which he was wrapped, although it was the month of August, and lifted up the hat, which the traveler caught and pulled violently down upon his forehead.

D'Artagnan, whose looks were fixed upon this man, turned very pale and let fall his glass.

"What is the matter, sir?" cried Planchet. "Oh! here, here. Make haste, gentlemen, my master is ill!"

The three friends hastened in, and found D'Artagnan, who, instead of being ill, was running to his horse. They stopped him on the threshold of the door.

"Hallo! where the plague are you going in this manner?" cried Athos.

"It is he!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, pale with passion, and with the perspiration standing on his brow—"it is he! let me get at him."

"But what do you mean?" demanded Athos.

"He! that man!"

"What man?"

"That cursed man, my evil genius, whom I have always seen when I was threatened with some misfortune—he who accompanied that horrible woman, when I met her the first time—he whom I was seeking when I affronted our friend Athos—he whom I saw the very morning of the day when Madame Bonancieux was carried off—the Man of Meung, in fact! I saw him—it is he! I recognized him when the wind opened his cloak."

"The devil!" said Athos, musing.

"To horse, gentlemen—to horse! Let us pursue him—we must catch him!"

"My dear fellow," said Aramis, "consider that he is going exactly the opposite road to ours: that he has a fresh horse, whilst our horses are tired; and that, consequently, we should knock up our horses without even a chance of overtaking him. Let us leave the man D'Artagnan and save the woman."

"Hallo, sir?" cried out a stable-boy, running after the stranger—"Hallo, sir! here is a paper which fell out of your hat. Hallo, sir! Hallo!"

"My friend," said D'Artagnan, "half a pistole for that paper?"

"Faith, with the greatest pleasure; here it is."

The stable-boy, delighted at the good day's work he had made of it, returned into the yard of the hotel, and D'Artagnan unfolded the paper.

"Well?" inquired his friends, listening.

"Only one word!" said D'Artagnan.

"Yes," said Aramis, "but that word is the name of a town."

"*Armentières*," read Porthos—"Armentières? I do not know the place."

"And this name of a town is written by her hand," said Athos.

"Come, come, let us take great care of this paper," said D'Artagnan; "perhaps I shall not have thrown away my half pistole. To horse, my friends—to horse!"

The four companions went off at a gallop, on the road to Bethune.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE CARMELITE CONVENT OF BETHUNE.

GREAT criminals are endowed with a kind of predestination which enables them to surmount every obstacle, and to escape every danger, until the moment which a wearied Providence has fixed upon for the shipwreck of their unhallowed fortunes.

Thus was it with her ladyship. She passed between the cruisers of two nations, and landed at Boulogne without accident.

When she disembarked at Portsmouth, her ladyship had been an Englishwoman, driven from Rochelle by the persecution of France. When she came on shore at Boulogne, after a voyage of two days, she represented herself as a Frenchwoman, whom the English annoyed at Portsmouth, on account of the hatred which they entertained against France.

Her ladyship had, moreover, the best of passports—beauty—aided by the liberality with which she scattered her pistoles. Freed from the customary formalities, by the affable smile and gallant manners of an old governor of the port, who kissed her hands, she only remained at Boulogne a sufficient time to put into the post a letter, written in these terms:

“To his Eminence, the Lord Cardinal Richelieu, at his camp before La Rochelle.

“My lord, your eminence may be assured that his grace the Duke of Buckingham will not set out for France.

LADY DE ****

“Boulogne, August 25th—Evening.

“P. S.—According to your eminence’s desire, I am proceeding to the Carmelite convent at Bethune, where I shall await your orders.”

In fact, her ladyship began her journey on the same evening. Night overtook her, and she stopped and slept at a tavern on the road: at five o’clock the next morning, she resumed her journey, and in three hours reached Bethune. She inquired her way to the convent of the Carmelites, and immediately entered it. The abbess came to meet her, and when her ladyship showed the cardinal’s order, a chamber was immediately prepared for her, and breakfast served.

The scenes of the past had all faded from this woman’s sight, and with her eyes fixed upon the future, she only saw the high fortune which was reserved for her by that cardinal whom she had so happily served, without his name being at all compromised in the bloody deed. The ever-changing passions which consumed her gave to her life the appearance of the clouds which ascend into the sky, reflecting sometimes the azure tint, sometimes the lurid, sometimes the blackness of the storm, yet leaving no traces but those of devastation and of death.

After her breakfast, the abbess came to pay her a visit. There are but few amusements in the cloister, and the good superior was in haste to make acquaintance with her new boarder.

Her ladyship wished to please the abbess, and this was a very easy task for a woman so truly superior; she endeavored to be amiable, and became charming; so that her entertainer was seduced by her varied conversation, as well as by the graces which appeared in all her person.

The abbess, who was of a noble family, more especially loved that gossip of the court which so rarely

reaches the extremities of the kingdom, and which has, especially, so much difficulty in passing through the walls of a convent, on the threshold of which all worldly sounds should cease.

Her ladyship, however, was well versed in all the intrigues of the aristocracy, in the midst of which she had constantly lived for five or six years; she therefore set about amusing the good abbess with an account of all the worldly practices of the French court, mixed up with the excessive devotions of the king. She gave her also the chronicle of scandals concerning those lords and ladies of the court, with whose names the abbess was familiar, and touched lightly on the amours of the queen and Buckingham—talking herself a great deal, that she might thus induce the abbess to talk a little.

But the abbess contented herself with listening, and smiling, without replying. Nevertheless, as her ladyship perceived that this sort of stories amused her greatly, she continued them; only she diverted the conversation upon the cardinal. On this point, however, she was slightly embarrassed, as she knew not whether the abbess was royalist or cardinalist. She therefore kept prudently betwixt the two. The abbess, on her part, maintained a still more prudent reserve, contenting herself with making a profound inclination of the head as often as the traveler mentioned the cardinal's name.

Her ladyship soon began to think that she should find this convent very tiresome. She resolved, therefore, to risk something, in order to know what course to steer. Wishing to ascertain how far the discretion of the abbess would extend, she began to speak unfavorably, at first by hints and then most circumstantially, of the cardinal: relating the amours of that minister with Madame d'Agüillon, Marion de Lorme, and some other women of gallantry.

The abbess listened more attentively, gradually became more animated, and smiled.

"Good," thought her ladyship, "she begins to relish my conversation. If she is a cardinalist, she is, at any rate, no very fanatical one."

She then dwelt upon the persecution which the cardinal exercised against his enemies. The abbess merely crossed herself, without approving or blaming. This confirmed her ladyship in the belief that the good superior was more of a royalist than a cardinalist; so she continued her remarks, becoming more and more severe.

"I am very ignorant on all such matters," said the abbess at last; "but remote as we are from the court, secluded as we find ourselves from intercourse with the world, we have most melancholy proofs of the truth of what you have been just relating, and one of our boarders has suffered bitterly from the vengeance and persecutions of the cardinal."

"One of your boarders," said her ladyship. "Oh! poor creature—how I pity her!"

"And you are right, for she is much to be pitied. Imprisonment, threats, ill-treatment—all these she has endured. But, after all," continued the abbess, "the cardinal had perhaps plausible reason for acting thus; and, although she has the aspect of an angel, we must not always judge of people by their looks."

"Good!" said her ladyship to herself; "who knows—I may perhaps make some discovery here. I am in luck."

She then set himself to communicate to her countenance an expression of the most perfect candor.

"Alas!" said she, "I know that: they tell us that we must not trust to physiognomies. But what can we trust to, if not to the most beautiful of the Lord's works? As for me, I shall probably be deceived throughout my whole

life, for I always confide in that person whose face inspires me with sympathy."

" You would be induced, then, to believe that this young woman is innocent!" said the abbess.

" The cardinal does not merely punish crimes," replied her ladyship; " there are certain virtues which he visits more severely than sins."

" You will allow me, madame, to express my surprise," said the abbess.

" At what?" asked her ladyship, with apparent simplicity.

" At the language which you hold."

" And what do you find astonishing in that language?" demanded her ladyship, with a smile.

" You are the cardinal's friend, since he has sent you here; and yet—"

" And yet I speak ill of him," replied her ladyship, finishing the abbess's thought.

" At least you do not speak much good of him."

" It is because I am not his friend, but his victim," said her ladyship, sighing.

" And yet that letter, by which he has recommended you to me—"

" Is an order to me to keep myself in a sort of prison, from which he will have me removed by some of his satellites."

" But why did you not escape?"

" Where should I go? Do you believe that there is a spot upon the earth which the cardinal cannot reach, if he pleases to take the trouble to stretch out his hand? If I were a man, it might, perchance, be possible; but being a woman—what would you have a woman do? This young boarder of yours—has she attempted to escape?"

"No, truly : but her case is different. I fancy that she is kept in France by some love affair."

"Then," said her ladyship, with a sigh, "if she loves, she is not altogether unhappy."

"So," said the abbess, looking with increasing interest at her ladyship, "it is another poor persecuted creature that I see ?"

"Alas ! yes," said her ladyship.

The abbess looked at her ladyship for an instant with some inquietude, as if a new thought was just arising in her mind.

"You are not an enemy of our most holy faith ?" said she, stammering.

"I," cried her ladyship, "I a Protestant ! Oh, no ! I call the God who hears us that I am, indeed, a zealous Catholic."

"Then, madame," replied the abbess, smiling, "be of good heart ; the house in which you are shall not be a very severe prison to you, and we will do all we can to soften your captivity. Moreover, you shall see that young woman, who is, no doubt, persecuted on account of some court intrigue : she is so amiable and so gracious, that she is sure to please you."

"What is her name ?"

"She has been recommended to me, under the name of Kitty, by a person of the highest rank. I have not endeavored to find out her other name."

"Kitty!" exclaimed her ladyship, "are you quite sure?"

"Yes, madame ; at least she so calls herself. Do you suppose you know her ?"

Her ladyship smiled as the idea suggested itself to her that this female might possibly be her former attendant. With her recollections of the young woman, there was associated a sentiment of anger, and a desire for revenge,

which somewhat disturbed the serenity of her features; but they soon resumed that expression of calmness and benevolence which this woman with a hundred faces had for the moment lost.

"But when may I see this young lady, for whom I already feel so great a sympathy?" demanded her ladyship.

"This evening," replied the abbess; "nay, even during the day. But as you say you have been traveling for four days, and arose this morning at five o'clock, you must now be in want of rest; lie down, therefore, and sleep; and we will awake you at dinner-time."

Although her ladyship could have very well dispensed with sleep, supported as she was by the excitement which a new adventure kindled in her heart so eager after intrigues, she nevertheless accepted the offer of the abbess. During the previous twelve or fourteen days, she had experienced so many different emotions, that if her iron constitution was still able to endure fatigue, her mind required some repose. She therefore took leave of the abbess, and lay down in peace, cradled in the ideas of vengeance, to which the name of Kitty had so naturally led her. She remembered the almost unlimited promise which the cardinal had made to her, if she should succeed in her enterprise. She *had* succeeded; and she might, therefore, avenge herself on D'Artagnan.

One thing alone alarmed her ladyship, and that was, the recollection of her husband, the Count de la Fere, whom she believed to be dead, or, at least, expatriated, and whom she now found in Athos, the dearest friend of D'Artagnan. But, if he was D'Artagnan's friend, he must have assisted him in all those plots, by the aid of which the queen had thwarted the designs of his eminence; if he was D'Artagnan's friend, he must be the cardinal's enemy, and she should undoubtedly be able to

envelop him in that vengeance, in the folds of which she hoped to stifle the young musketeer.

All these hopes formed agreeable thoughts to her ladyship, and, lulled by them, she soon slept. She was awoke by a soft voice, which sounded at the foot of her bed. On opening her eyes, she saw the abbess, accompanied by a young woman with fair hair and a delicate complexion, who fixed on her a look full of kindly curiosity. The countenance of this young woman was entirely unknown to her. As they exchanged the usual courtesies, they examined each other with scrupulous attention. Both were very beautiful, yet quite unlike each other in their kinds of beauty; and her ladyship smiled on observing that she had herself much more of a high-bred air and aristocratic manners. It is true that the dress of a novice, which the young woman wore, was not very favorable to a competition of the sort.

The abbess presented them to one another; and then, as her own duties demanded her attendance in the church, she left them alone together. The novice, seeing her ladyship in bed, would have followed the abbess, but her ladyship detained her.

"What, madame," said she, "I have scarcely seen you, and you already wish to deprive me of your company, which I had hoped to enjoy during the time that I may remain here."

"No, madame," replied the novice, "but as you are fatigued, and were asleep, I feared that my visit has been badly timed."

"Well!" said her ladyship, "what should be desired by those who sleep? A pleasant awakening. That is just what you have given me; so let me enjoy it at my ease!"

And, taking her hand, she drew her to a chair near the bed.

"My God!" said the novice, seating herself, "how unfortunate I am. Here have I been in this house for six months, without even the shadow of an amusement. You arrive; your presence would provide me with most charming company; and now, according to all probability, I shall immediately leave the convent."

"What," said her ladyship, "are you going away so soon?"

"At least I hope so," replied the novice, with an expression of joy which she did not in the least attempt to disguise.

"I think I heard that you had suffered from the persecutions of the cardinal," said her ladyship. "That is another ground of sympathy between us."

"What our good mother has told me is true, then, and you are also one of the cardinal's victims?"

"Hush!" said her ladyship; "even here do not let us thus speak of him. All my misfortunes have arisen from having spoken scarcely more than you have just said, before a woman whom I thought my friend, and who betrayed me. And are you, also, the victim of treachery?"

"No," said the novice, "but of my devotion to a woman whom I loved, for whom I would have died, for whom I would die now."

"And who deserted you in your distress: is that the story?"

"I was unjust enough to believe so: but within the last two or three days I have had proof to the contrary, and I thank God for it; I should have been deeply grieved at the conviction that she had forgotten me. But you, madame, you seem to be free, and to be able to escape if you have any inclination to do so."

"And where could I go, without friends, without money, in a part of France which I do not know, where——"

"Oh! as to friends," said the novice, "you will find them

wherever you please; you look so good, and you are so beautiful."

"That is no reason," said her ladyship, softening her smile so as to give herself an angelic expression, "why I should not be forsaken and persecuted."

"Listen," said the novice: "you must trust in Heaven; there always comes a moment when the good that we have done pleads for us before God's throne. Besides, it is perhaps a piece of good fortune for you, that, humble and powerless as I am, you should have met me here: for, if I should get away, I have some influential friends, who, having exerted themselves for me, may also assist you."

"Oh! when I said that I was solitary and forsaken," said her ladyship, hoping to make the novice speak more plainly by speaking herself; "it is not because I have not some lofty acquaintances also, but these acquaintances all tremble before the cardinal. The queen herself does not defend me against this terrible minister; and I have proofs that her majesty, in spite of her excellent heart, has been more than once obliged to abandon, to his eminence's rage, persons who had faithfully served her."

"Believe me, madame, it may have appeared that the queen forsook her friends; but we must not believe the appearance; the more they are persecuted, the more she thinks of them; and often at the very moment when they suppose she is the least mindful of them, they receive an evidence of her kind remembrance."

"Alas!" said her ladyship, "I believe it; the queen is so good!"

"Oh! you know her, then—this beautiful and noble queen—since you speak of her thus!" exclaimed the novice, enthusiastically.

"That is to say," replied her ladyship, rather forced

back into her intrenchments, "I have not the honor of knowing her personally, but I know many of her most intimate friends. I know M. de Putange, I know M. Dujart in England ; and I know M. de Treville."

"M. de Treville !" exclaimed the novice ; "do you know M. de Treville ?"

"Yes, very well indeed."

"The captain of the king's musketeers ?"

"Yes, the captain of the king's musketeers !"

"Oh ! then you will see presently that we must be acquainted—almost friends. If you know M. de Treville, you must have been at his house ?"

"Often," said her ladyship, who, having entered on this path, and finding falsehood profitable, determined to pursue it to the end.

"At his house you must have seen some of his musketeers !"

"All of them whom he is the habit of receiving," replied her ladyship, who began to take a real interest in the conversation."

"Name some of those that you know," said the novice, "and you will see that they are amongst my friends."

"Why," said her ladyship, somewhat confused, "I know M. de Louvigny, M. de Courtivron, M. de Ferusac."

The novice let her go on, but, seeing her hesitate, said :

"Do you know a gentleman named Athos ?"

Her ladyship became as pale as the sheets on which she was reclining, and mistress as she was of her emotions, she could not help uttering a cry, as she seized the hand of the novice, and fastened her gaze upon her.

"Ah ! what is the matter with you ? Oh ! my God !" said the poor young woman, "have I said anything to offend you ?"

"No, but I was struck by the name; for I have been

acquainted with this gentleman also ; and it seemed strange that I should meet with any one who knew him well."

"Oh, yes, very well ; and his friends, also, M. Porthos and M. Aramis."

"Really ? And I knew them, too," exclaimed her ladyship, who felt a cold shudder penetrating to her heart.

"Well, if you are acquainted with them, you ought to know that they are good and brave companions. Why do you not apply to them, if you want protection ?"

"That is to say," stammered her ladyship, "I am not very intimate with any of them. I know them, having heard them spoken of by one of their friends, M. d'Artagnan."

"You know M. d'Artagnan !" exclaimed the novice in turn, seizing her ladyship's hand, and devouring her with her eyes. Then remarking the strange expression of her ladyship's countenance—"Pardon me, madame ; you know him, and in what character ?"

"Why," replied her ladyship, in some embarrassment, "in the character of a friend."

"You deceive me, madame," said the novice : "you have been his mistress."

"It is you who have been so," said her ladyship in turn.

"I, I !" said the novice.

"Yes, you : I know you now : you are Madame Bonancieux."

The young woman drew herself back, overwhelmed with astonishment and terror.

"Oh ! do not deny it ; but pray answer," said her ladyship.

"Well ! yes, madame, I love him," said the novice. "Are we rivals ?"

Her ladyship's face was irradiated by a light so wild, that under any other circumstances, Madame Bonancieux

would have fled from her in affright; but she was entirely absorbed by jealousy.

“Come! tell me, madame,” said Madame Bonancieux, with an energy of which she would have been thought incapable, “have you been his mistress?”

“Oh, no!” exclaimed her ladyship, in a tone which precluded any doubt of her truth; “never! never!”

“I believe you,” said Madame Bonancieux; “but why did you cry out so?”

“What, do you not understand!” said her ladyship, who had already recovered from her confusion, and had resumed all her presence of mind.

“How should I understand? I know nothing——”

“Do you not understand that M. d’Artagnan, being my friend, made me his confidant?”

“Really!”

“Do you not understand, that I am acquainted with everything that has taken place; your abduction from the little house of St. Germain, his despair, that of his friends, and their researches ever since that time? Would you not expect me to be astonished on finding myself, without being aware of it, by the side of the woman of whom we have so often talked together—whom he loves with all the strength of his soul—whom he made me love before I beheld you! Ah, dear Constance, I find you at last: at last I see you.”

Her ladyship held out her arms toward Madame Bonancieux, who, convinced by what she had just heard, now saw in this woman, whom she had an instant before regarded as a rival, only a sincere and devoted friend.

“Oh, pardon me, pardon me!” said she, allowing herself to sink upon her shoulder. “I love him so much!”

These two women held each other for an instant thus embraced. Certainly if her ladyship’s strength had been but equal to her hatred, Madame Bonancieux would not

have left her arms alive. But, not being able to stifle her, she smiled.

"Oh, dear little beauty!" said her ladyship, "how delighted I am to see you! Let me look at you." And as she uttered these words, she did, in fact, devour her with her eyes. "Yes, it is certainly you. Ah, after what he told me of you, I recognize you perfectly well."

The poor young woman could not suspect the horrid cruelty that was raging behind the ramparts of that unruffled brow, or behind those eyes in which she only read the interest of compassion.

"Then you know what I have suffered," said Madame Bonancieux, "since he has told you what he himself endured. But to suffer for him is happiness."

Her ladyship replied, mechanically, "Yes, it is happiness." But she was thinking of something different.

"And then," continued Madame Bonancieux, "my punishment draws near its end. To-morrow—this very evening, perhaps—I shall see him once more; and then the past will be forgotten."

"This evening? To-morrow?" exclaimed her ladyship, aroused from her reverie by these words; "what can you mean? Do you expect to hear anything about him?"

"I expect him himself."

"Himself? D'Artagnan here?"

"Yes, himself."

"But it is impossible! He is at the siege of La Rochelle, with the cardinal; he will not return to Paris until after the town is taken."

"You think so; but is there anything impossible to my D'Artagnan, the noble and loyal gentleman?"

"Oh, I cannot believe you!"

"Well, then, read!" said the unhappy young woman, in the excess of her pride and joy, and showing a letter to her ladyship.

"The writing of Madame de Chevreuse," said her ladyship to herself. "Ah! I was quite sure that there were some communications in that quarter." And she eagerly read these lines :

"My dear child, be ready. *Our friend* will soon see you, and he will only come to snatch you from the prison where it was necessary for your safety to conceal you. So prepare for your departure, and never despair of us. Our brave Gascon has just shown himself as brave and as faithful as ever: tell him that there is much gratitude in a certain quarter for the warning which he gave."

"Yes, yes," said her ladyship, "the letter is very precise. And do you know what this warning was?"

"No: I only suspect that he must have warned the queen of some new machination of the cardinal."

"Yes, that is it unquestionably," said her ladyship, returning the letter, and letting her head fall pensively on her breast.

At that moment the gallop of a horse was heard.

"Oh," exclaimed Madame Bonancieux, rushing to the window, "can this be he?"

Her ladyship remained in her bed, petrified by the surprise. So many unsuspected things had suddenly happened to her, that for the first time, her heart failed her.

"He! he!" muttered she, "and if it should be?" And she continued in bed, with her eyes fixed on vacancy.

"Alas! no," said Madame Bonancieux. "It is a man whom I do not know. But he seems to be coming here. Yes, he is riding more slowly; he stops at the gate; he rings."

Her ladyship sprang out of bed. "You are quite sure that it is not he?"

"Oh! yes, certain."

"Perhaps you do not see him distinctly."

"Oh! should I see only the plume in his hat, or the hem of his cloak, I should not fail to recognize him!"

Her ladyship was hurrying on her clothes. "No matter; the man is coming here, you say?"

"Yes, he has come in."

"It must be either for you or for me."

"Oh, my God! how agitated you are!"

"Yes; I confess that I have not your confidence; I dread everything from the cardinal."

"Hush!" said Madame Bonancieux; "some one is coming."

The door opened, and the abbess entered.

"Did you come from Boulogne?" demanded she, of her ladyship.

"Yes, madame," replied the latter, endeavoring to resume her calmness: "who wants me?"

"A man, who will not give his name, but who comes from the cardinal."

"And who wants to speak to me?" demanded her ladyship.

"Who wants to speak with a lady who has just arrived from Boulogne?"

"Then show him in, madame, I beseech you."

"Oh! my God! my God!" said Madame Bonancieux, "can it be any bad news?"

"I fear so."

"I leave you with this stranger; but as soon as he is gone, I will return, if you will allow me."

"Yes; I beseech you to do so!"

The abbess and Madame Bonancieux left the room. Her ladyship remained alone, with her eyes fixed upon the door. A moment afterward came the sound of spurs jingling on the stairs; the steps came nearer; the door was opened, and a man appeared. Her ladyship uttered a cry of joy. This man was the Count de Rochefort, the evil spirit of his eminence.

CHAPTER LXII.

TWO KINDS OF DEMONS.

“Ah!” exclaimed both Rochefort and her ladyship at the same instant, “is it you?”

“Yes, it is I.”

“And you come from——” demanded her ladyship.

“From La Rochelle. And you?”

“From England.”

“And Buckingham——”

“Is dead or dangerously wounded. As I was leaving, without having obtained anything from him, a fanatic had just assassinated him.”

“Ah!” said Rochefort, smiling, “that was a very fortunate chance, which will much please his eminence. Have you informed him of it?”

“I wrote to him from Boulogne. But what brings you here?”

“His eminence being uneasy, has sent me to look for you.”

“I only arrived yesterday.”

“And what have you been doing since?”

“I have not been wasting my time.”

“Oh, I do not suspect you.”

“Do you know whom I have met with here?”

“No.”

“Guess.”

“How can I?”

“That young woman whom the queen took from prison.”

“What! the mistress of young D’Artagnan?”

"Yes, Madame Bonancieux, whose hiding-place the cardinal could not discover."

"Well, then," said Rochefort, "this is a chance quite fit to pair with the other. Verily, the cardinal is a fortunate man."

"Fancy my astonishment," continued her ladyship, "when I found myself face to face with this woman."

"Does she know you?"

"No."

"Then she looks upon you as a stranger?"

Her ladyship smiled "I am her dearest friend."

"Upon my honor," said Rochefort, "my dear countess, it is only you who can perform this sort of miracle."

"And well it is that I can, chevalier," said her ladyship, "for do you know what is about to happen?"

"No."

"They are coming for her to-morrow, or the next day, with an order from the queen."

"Really! And who are they?"

"D'Artagnan, and his friends."

"Verily, they will do so much that we shall be obliged to put them into the Bastile."

"And why has it not been done already?"

"How can I tell? Because the cardinal evinces toward these men a weakness which I cannot comprehend."

"Really! Well, then, tell him this, Rochefort: tell him that our conversation at the Red Dove-cote was heard by these four men—tell him that, after his departure, one of them came up and took from me by force the passport he had given me—tell him that they gave Lord de Winter warning of my voyage to England—that this time again, they nearly prevented the success of my undertaking, as they did that of the diamond studs—tell him that amongst these four men, only two are to be feared, D'Artagnan and Athos—tell him that the third, Aramis is the lover of

Madame de Chevreuse: he must be allowed to live, for his secret is known, and he may be made useful; and as for the fourth, Porthos, he is a fool, a fop, a ninny, not worth giving one's self the smallest trouble about."

"But these four men ought to be at this moment at the siege of La Rochelle."

"I thought so too; but a letter which Madame Bonancieux has received from Madame de Chevreuse, and which she had the imprudence to communicate to me, leads me to believe that these four men are now on their way to carry her off."

"The devil! What must we do?"

"What did the cardinal say to you about me?"

"That I was to take your dispatches, whether verbal or written, and to return by post. When he knows what you have done, he will give you further directions."

"I must remain here, then?"

"Here, or in the neighborhood."

"You cannot take me with you?"

"No, the order is precise. In the neighborhood of the camp you might be recognized; and you can understand that your presence might compromise his eminence, especially after what has just happened in England. Only tell me beforehand where you will await the cardinal's orders, that I may know where to find you."

"Listen; it is very probable that I cannot remain here."

"Why?"

"You forget that my enemies may arrive at any moment."

"True. But then this little woman will escape his eminence."

"Bah!" said her ladyship with a smile peculiar to herself, "you forget that I am her best friend."

"Ah! that is true. Then may I tell the cardinal, with regard to this woman——"

“That he may make himself easy.”

“Is that all? Will he know what that means?”

“He will guess it.”

“And now, let us see, what ought I to do?”

“You must set off this instant. It appears to me that the news you carry is well worth the trouble of a little haste.”

“My carriage broke down on entering Lilliers.”

“Excellent.”

“What do you mean by *excellent?*”

“Why, I want your carriage?”

“And how am I to travel, then?”

“On post-horses.”

“You talk of it very unconcernedly; a hundred and eighty leagues.”

“What does that signify?”

“Well, it shall be done. What next?”

“On passing through Lilliers you will send your carriage to me, with directions to your servant to attend to my commands.”

“Very well.”

“You have, no doubt, some order from the cardinal in your possession.”

“Yes, I have my plenary authority.”

“You will show that to the abbess, and you will tell her that I shall be sent for either to-day or to-morrow, and that I must accompany the person sent in your name.”

“Very well.”

“Do not forget to speak harshly of me, when you talk to the abbess.”

“Why so?”

“I am one of the cardinal’s victims. I must inspire some confidence in that poor little Madame Bonancieux.”

“True. And now will you make me a report of all that has occurred?”

"I have already told you" the events, and you have a good memory; so repeat what I told you. A paper may be lost."

"You are right; only let me know where you are to be found, that I may not have to run about the country in vain."

"Ah! that is true. Wait."

"Do you require a map?"

"Oh, I know this country well."

"You? When did you ever visit it?"

"I was educated here."

"Indeed!"

"It is some advantage, you see, to have been educated somewhere."

"You will wait for me, then——"

"Let me consider a moment—ah! yes, at Armentières."

"And where is Armentières?"

"It is a little village on the Lys. I shall only have to cross the river, and I shall be in a foreign country."

"Capital; but you must remember that you are only to cross the river in case of danger."

"That is understood."

"And in that case, how shall I discover where you are?"

"You do not want your servant? Is he one on whom you can depend?"

"Perfectly."

"Give him to me: no one knows him. I will leave him at the place I quit, and he will conduct you to me."

"And you say that you will wait for me at Armentières?"

"At Armentières."

"Write the name for me on a slip of paper, lest I should forget it. The name of a village will not compromise any one, will it?"

"Ah! who knows? but never mind," said her ladyship,

writing the name on a half sheet of paper, “I will run the hazard.”

“Good,” said Rochefort, taking from her ladyship’s hands the paper which he folded and stuffed into the lining of his hat.

“And I shall, besides, do like the children, and, as a provision against the loss of the paper, I shall repeat the name all the way I go. Now, is that all?”

“I think so.”

“Let us see: Buckingham dead, or grievously wounded; your conversation with the cardinal, heard by the musketeers; Lord de Winter warned of your arrival at Portsmouth; D’Artagnan and Athos to the Bastile; Aramis, the lover of Madame de Chevreuse; Porthos a fool; Madame Bonancieux discovered; to send you the carriage as soon as possible; to put my servant under your orders; to make you a victim of the cardinal, that the abbess may have no suspicion; Armentières, on the banks of the Lys? is that right?”

“Verily, my dear chevalier, you are a miracle of memory. But, by the way, add one thing.”

“And what is that?”

“I saw some very pretty woods, which must join the gardens of the convent. Say that I may be allowed to walk in these woods. Who knows?—I may perhaps be obliged to get out by some back door.”

“You think of everything.”

“And you forget one thing.”

“What is that?”

“To ask me whether I want any money?”

“Exactly; how much will you have?”

“All the gold you may have about you.”

“I have nearly five hundred pistoles.”

“I have about as many. With a thousand pistoles one may face anything. Empty your pockets.”

“There.”

“Good. And when do you set off?”

“In one hour; just time enough to eat a morsel, whilst I send to fetch a post-horse.”

“Excellent. Adieu, count.”

“Adieu, countess.”

“My compliments to the cardinal.”

“Mine to Satan.”

Her ladyship and Rochefort exchanged smiles, and separated.

In an hour afterward, Rochefort set out at full speed; and five hours afterward he passed through Arras. Our readers already know how he was recognized by D'Artagnan, and how that recognition, by exciting the fears of our four musketeers, had given new activity to their journey.

CHAPTER LXIII.

A DROP OF WATER.

SCARCELY had Rochefort left, before Madame Bonancieux returned. She found her ladyship with a smiling countenance.

"Well," said the young woman, "what you feared has happened. This evening or to-morrow, the cardinal will send for you!"

"How do you know that?"

"I heard it from the lips of the messenger himself."

"Come and sit down by me," said her ladyship: "but first let me be sure that no one hears us."

"And why all these precautions?"

"You will soon know."

Her ladyship arose, went to the door, opened it, looked along the corridor, and then came back, and seated herself again by the side of Madame Bonancieux.

"Then," said she again, "he played his part well."

"Who did?"

"He who introduced himself to the abbess as the envoy of the cardinal."

"Was it, then, a part that he was acting?"

"Yes, my child."

"Then that man is not—"

"That man," said her ladyship, lowering her voice, "is my brother."

"Your brother!" exclaimed Madame Bonancieux.

"Nobody but you knows this secret, my child; if you

should intrust it to anybody in the world, I should be ruined, and you, also, perhaps."

"Oh, God!"

"Listen: this is what has taken place. My brother, who was coming to my aid, to take me away from here, by force if necessary, met the cardinal's emissary, who was on his way to fetch me. He followed him. On arriving at a retired solitary spot, he drew his sword, and commanded the messenger to deliver to him the papers which he carried. The messenger endeavored to defend himself, and my brother slew him."

"Oh!" said Madame Bonacieux, shuddering.

"There was no alternative, remember. My brother then determined to make use of craft instead of force. He took the papers, presented himself here as the emissary of the cardinal himself, and in an hour or two, a carriage will come and take me away in his eminence's name."

"I understand; it is your brother who will send this carriage?"

"Exactly so. But that is not all: that letter which you have received, and which you believe to be from Madame Chevreuse—"

"Well?"

"Is a forgery."

"What?"

"Yes, a forgery; it is a snare that you may make no resistance when they come to fetch you."

"But it is D'Artagnan who will come!"

"Undeceive yourself, D'Artagan and his friends are at the siege of La Rochelle."

"How do you know that?"

"My brother met with some of the cardinal's agents, in the uniform of musketeers. They were to call you out to the gate; you would have believed that you were in the

company of friends ; and they were to carry you off and convey you to Paris."

"Oh ! Heaven ! my mind fails me in the midst of such a chaos of iniquities. I feel that if it lasts long," said Madame Bonancieux, putting her hands to her head, "I shall go mad."

"Listen : I hear the step of a horse ; it is that of my brother, who is going away. I must take a last farewell of him. Come."

Her ladyship opened the window, and made a sign to Madame Bonancieux to join her. The young woman went to her ; and Rochefort passed by at a gallop.

"Good-bye, brother," said her ladyship.

The chevalier raised his head, saw the two young women, and, as he went rapidly past, made a friendly farewell motion with his hand.

"That good George!" said she, closing the window, with an expression of countenance full of affection and melancholy.

She returned, and sat down in her place, as though buried in thoughts of a personal kind.

"Dear lady," said Madame Bonancieux, "pardon me for interrupting you ; but what do you advise me to do ? You have more experience than I have ; speak, and I will listen."

"In the first place," said her ladyship, "I might possibly be deceived, and D'Artagnan and his friends may be really coming to your assistance."

"Oh ! that would be too fortunate," said Madame Bonancieux, "and I fear that so much happiness is not reserved for me."

"Then, do you see, it would be merely a question of time, a kind of race, as to which would arrive first. If it should be your friends who made best haste, why, then,

you would be saved; but, if it were the cardinal's satellites, then you would be ruined."

"Oh! yes, yes! lost without mercy. But what must I do? what must I do?"

"There is one very simple and very natural plan."

"And what is that? Tell me!"

"It would be to wait, concealed in the neighborhood; and so to make yourself sure who the men were who came to seek you."

"But where can I wait?"

"Oh! that is not a matter of difficulty. I, myself, must wait, and conceal myself at a few league's distance from here until my brother comes to meet me. Well, then, I shall take you with me—we can hide and wait together."

"But I shall not be allowed to leave this place: I am almost regarded as a prisoner here."

"As it is supposed that I leave on account of an order from the cardinal, it will not be believed that you are very anxious to follow me."

"Well?"

"Very well. The carriage being at the door, you will bid me adieu, and you will get upon the steps to press me in your arms for the last time. My brother's servant, who is coming to fetch me, being forewarned, will give a signal to the postilion, and we shall go off at full gallop."

"But D'Artagnan—if he should come?"

"Shall we not know it?"

"How?"

"Nothing is more easy. We will send this servant of my brother's, in whom I have told you that I have the greatest confidence, back to Bethune; and he shall disguise himself, and find a lodging opposite the convent. If it should be the cardinal's emissaries who come, he will not stir; if it should be M. d'Artagnan and his friends, he will lead them to where we are."

“He knows them, then?”

“Certainly; has he not seen M. d'Artagnan at my house?”

“Oh! yes, yes, you are right. Thus, all will go on well. But do not let us go far away from here.”

“Seven or eight leagues at the most. We will keep upon the frontiers and upon the first alarm we will quit France.”

“In the meantime, what must we do?”

“Wait.”

“But if they should come!”

“My brother's carriage will arrive before them.”

“Suppose I should be away from you when it arrived —at dinner, or at supper, for example?”

“Tell our good abbess that in order that we may be as little separated as possible, you request her to allow you to take your meals with me.”

“Will she permit it?”

“What objection can there be to that! Go down now to her, and make your request. I feel my head a little heavy, and so I shall take a turn in the garden.”

“And where may I see you again?”

“Here, in one hour from this time.”

“Here, in one hour! Oh, you are very kind, and I thank you.”

“How should I avoid being interested in you? If you had not been beautiful and charming, are you not the friend of one of my best friends?”

“Dear D'Artagnan! Oh, how he will thank you!”

“I hope so. Come, it is all arranged; let us go down.”

“You are going to the garden? Proceed along this corridor; a little staircase leads you to it.”

“Good. Thank you.”

And the two ladies separated, exchanging charming smiles.

Her ladyship had spoken the truth; her head was heavy, for her projects, badly arranged, clashed against each other as in chaos. She had need to be alone that she might put a little order into her ideas. She saw dimly into the future; but it required some moments of silence and tranquillity to give to this confused assemblage of conceptions a definite form, and a decided plan. What was now most urgent, was to carry off Madame Bonancieux, and put her in a place of security, and then, should her game fail, to use her as a hostage. Her ladyship began to dread the issue of this terrible duel, in which her enemies were quite as persevering as she herself was unrelenting. Besides, she felt, as one feels the approaches of a storm, that this issue was near, and would not fail to be fearful.

The principal point for her was, as we have said, to get possession of Madame Bonancieux. By this means she would hold in her hands the life of D'Artagnan; or more even than his life, for she would hold that of the woman he loved. In case of evil fortune, it was a means of opening negotiations, and of securing favorable terms.

Now, it was certain that Madame Bonancieux would follow her without distrust; and let her be but once concealed with her at Armentières, it would be easy to make her believe that D'Artagnan had never visited Bethune. In a fortnight, at most, Rochefort would return. During that time she would meditate on what she must do to avenge herself on the four friends. She should not be impatient: for she should have the sweetest occupation that events can ever give to a woman of her character—a hearty vengeance to perfect.

Whilst thus meditating, she cast her eye around her, and mapped out in her mind the topography of the garden. Her ladyship was like a good general, who foresees at the same time both victory and defeat, and who

is quite ready, according to the chances of the battle, either to advance or to retreat.

At the expiration of an hour, she heard a soft voice calling her. It was Madame Bonancieux. The good abbess had consented to everything, and to begin, they were just about to sup together. On entering the court, they heard the sound of a carriage, which was stopping at the gate. Her ladyship listened.

"Do you hear?" said she.

"Yes; the rolling of a carriage."

"It is that which my brother sends for us."

"Oh! God!"

"Come, have courage!"

There was a ring at the convent gate. Her ladyship was not mistaken.

"Go up into your room," said she to Madame Bonancieux; "you must have some trinkets that you would like to carry with you."

"I have his letters," replied she.

"Well! go for them, and come back to me in my room: we will sup hastily; for, as we shall perhaps have to travel a part of the night, we must recruit our strength."

"Great God!" said Madame Bonancieux, placing her hands upon her heart; "I am choking—I cannot walk."

"Courage; come, take courage. Think that in a quarter of an hour you will be safe, and think that what you are about to do is done for his sake."

"Oh, yes, all, all for him! You have restored my courage by that single word. Go; I will rejoin you."

Her ladyship went hastily up to her own room, where she found Rochefort's valet, and gave him his instructions. He was to wait for her at the gate; if, by chance, the musketeers should arrive, he was to go off at a gallop, make the circuit of the convent, and wait for her at a little village, which was situated on the other side of the wood.

In that case, her ladyship would walk through the garden, and reach the village on foot; we have already said that her ladyship was perfectly well acquainted with this part of France. If the musketeers should not make their appearance, everything would be conducted as had been previously arranged. Madame Bonancieux was to get into the carriage on pretence of wishing her once more adieu, and she would then escape with her.

Madame Bonancieux came in; and, to remove all suspicion, if she had any, her ladyship repeated to the valet, in her presence, the latter part of his instructions. Her ladyship then made some inquiries about the carriage; it was a chaise, drawn by three horses, and driven by a postilion. The valet was to precede it as a courier.

Her ladyship was altogether wrong in fearing that suspicion troubled Madame Bonancieux. The poor young woman was too pure herself to suspect another of so black a perfidy. Besides, the name of Lady de Winter, which she had heard mentioned by the abbess, was entirely unknown to her; and she had not imagined that a woman had performed so large and fatal a part in bringing about the misfortunes of her life.

" You see," said her ladyship, when the valet had left the room, " that everything is ready. The abbess has not the slightest suspicion, and fully believes that I am sent for by the cardinal. The man has gone out to give his final orders; eat something, however little; drink a thimbleful of wine; and let us be off."

" Yes," said Madame Bonancieux, mechanically, " yes, let us go."

Her ladyship made her a sign to sit down, poured out for her a small glass of Spanish wine, and helped her to a part of the breast of a chicken.

" There," said she; " everything is propitious; here is the night coming on; at daybreak we shall have reached

our retreat, and no one will suspect where we are. Come, have courage, and take something."

Madame Bonancieux ate two or three mouthfuls mechanically, and just put her lips to the wine.

"Come, come," said her ladyship, lifting her own glass toward her mouth, "do as I do."

But at the moment she was about to drink, her hand was suddenly arrested. Her ears caught the distant sound of an approaching gallop on the road, and then, almost at the same instant, she seemed to hear the neighing of the horses. This sound destroyed her exultation, as the uproar of a storm awakens us from a delightful dream. She grew pale, and ran to the window; whilst Madame Bonancieux, who had got up, trembled so as to be obliged to support herself by a chair for fear of falling. Nothing had become yet visible, but the galloping was more distinctly heard.

"Oh, my God!" said Madame Bonancieux, "what can that noise be?"

"That of our friends or our enemies," said her ladyship, with a terrible calmness. "Remain where you are, and I will go and ascertain."

Madame Bonancieux remained standing, mute, motionless, and pale as a statue. The sound became more audible. The horses could not be more than a hundred and fifty yards off, but were not yet visible on account of a turning in the road. Still the noise was now so distinct, that the number of the horses might have been counted by the clattering of their iron hoofs.

Her ladyship gazed with the most intense attention: there was just light enough to recognize those who were approaching. Suddenly, at the turn of the road, she saw the glitter of laced hats, and the waving of plumes; she counted two, then five, then eight, horsemen. One of them was two lengths in advance of his companions.

Her ladyship gave utterance to a roar. In the foremost rider she recognized D'Artagna

"Oh, my God, my God!" exclaimed Madame Bonancieux, "what is the matter?"

"It is the uniform of the cardinal's guards; there is not a moment to be lost," exclaimed her ladyship. "Let us fly! let us fly!"

"Yes, yes, let us fly," repeated Madame Bonancieux, but without the power of moving one step, rooted as she was to her place by terror.

The horsemen were heard passing under her window.

"Come along; come along," said her ladyship, endeavoring to drag the young woman by the arm. "Thanks to the garden, we may yet escape, for I have got the key. But let us make haste: in less than five minutes it will be too late."

Madame Bonancieux attempted to walk, but, after taking two steps, she fell upon her knees.

Her ladyship attempted to lift her up and carry her, but she found herself unable. At this moment they heard the wheels of the carriage, which, on the appearance of the musketeers, went off at a gallop, and then three or four shots resounded.

"For the last time, will you come?" exclaimed her ladyship.

"Oh, my God! my God! you see that my strength is all gone; you see that I cannot walk. Fly, and save yourself."

"Fly alone? Leave you here? No, no—never?" exclaimed her ladyship.

Suddenly a vivid lightning flashed from her eyes: she ran to the table, and poured into Madame Bonancieux's glass the contents of the hollow part of a ring, which she opened with singular dexterity. It was a red particle which was immediately dissolved. Then, taking the glass with a hand that did not tremble:

"Drink," said she, hastily : "this wine will give you strength—drink!"

She put the glass to the lips of the young woman, who drank mechanically.

"Ah! it was not thus that I wished to avenge myself," said her ladyship, putting the glass upon the table, with a hellish smile ; "but, faith ! we must do the best we can," and she rushed out of the room.

Madame Bonancieux saw her escape, without being able to follow her. She was like those who dream that they are pursued, yet feel powerless to move. A few minutes elapsed, and then a frightful noise was heard at the gate. At every instant Madame Bonancieux expected to see the reappearance of her ladyship ; but she did not return. Many times—from terror, no doubt—the cold drops stood upon her burning brow.

At length she heard the rattling of the grated doors, which were being opened ; the noise of boots and spurs resounded on the stairs ; and there was a loud murmur of many approaching voices, in the midst of which she fancied that she heard her own name mentioned. Suddenly she uttered a loud scream of joy, and rushed toward the door —she had recognized the voice of D'Artagnan.

"D'Artagnan! D'Artagnan!" she exclaimed, "is it you ? Here, here !"

"Constance! Constance!" replied the young man. "My God ! where are you ?"

At the same moment the door of the cell was burst in, rather than opened. Many men rushed into the room. Madame Bonancieux had fallen on a chair, without the power of motion. D'Artagnan cast away a still smoking pistol, which he held in his hand, and fell upon his knees before his mistress. Athos replaced his pistol in his belt ; and Porthos and Aramis returned the swords, which they had drawn, into their sheaths.

"Oh! D'Artagnan, my beloved D'Artagnan! you come at last. You did not deceive me: it is really you!"

"Yes, yes, Constance, we are at last united!"

"Oh! *she* told me in vain that you would never come. I always secretly hoped. I did not wish to fly. Oh, how wisely I have chosen! how happy I am!"

At the word *she*, Athos, who had quietly sat down, suddenly arose.

"*She?* Who is *she?*?" demanded D'Artagnan.

"Why, my companion—she who, through friendship for me, wished to withdraw me from my persecutors; she who, taking you for the cardinal's guards, has just fled."

"Your companion!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, becoming paler than the white veil of his mistress: "of what companion are you talking?"

"Of her whose carriage was at the door—of a woman who called herself your friend, D'Artagnan—of a woman to whom you confided everything about us."

"Her name," exclaimed D'Artagnan, "do you not know her name?"

"Yes, I do; they mentioned it before me. Wait—but it is very strange—oh, my God! my head becomes confused—I cannot see anything—"

"Come here, my friends! come here!—her hands are icy," exclaimed D'Artagnan—"she is very ill. Great God! she is losing her senses."

Whilst Porthos was calling for help with all the power of his lungs, Aramis ran for a glass of water; but he stopped on beholding the fearful alteration in the countenance of Athos, who was standing before the table, with his hair on end, and his features frozen with terror, looking into one of the glasses, and seeming a prey to the most horrible suspicion.

"Oh!" said Athos, "oh, no! it is impossible! Such a crime would never be permitted by the Almighty!"

some one they had previously seen, although they could not recollect under what circumstances.

"Gentlemen," continued the stranger, "since you will not recognize a man whose life you have probably twice saved, I must needs give my name. I am Lord de Winter, the brother-in-law of that woman."

The three friends uttered an exclamation of surprise. Athos arose, and offered him his hand.

"Welcome, my lord," said he; "you are one of us."

"I left Portsmouth five hours after her," said Lord de Winter; "reached Boulogne three hours after her; I only missed her by twenty minutes at St. Omer; but at St. Lilliers I lost all trace of her. I wandered about at chance, inquiring of everybody, when I saw you pass at a gallop. I recognized M. d'Artagnan, and called out to you; but you did not answer me. I attempted to keep up with you, but my horse was too tired to go at the same pace as yours did; and yet, in spite of all your haste, it seems that you have arrived too late."

"The proof is before you," said Athos, pointing to Madame Bonancieux, who was lying dead, and to D'Artagnan, whom Porthos and Aramis were endeavoring to restore to life.

"Are they both dead?" demanded Lord de Winter, calmly.

"No, happily," replied Athos. "D'Artagnan has only fainted."

"Ah! so much the better," said Lord de Winter.

In fact, at that moment, D'Artagnan opened his eyes. He tore himself from the arms of Porthos and Aramis, and threw himself like a madman on the body of his mistress.

Athos arose, walked toward his friend with a slow and solemn step, embraced him tenderly, and then, whilst

D'Artagnan broke out in sobs, said to him, in his noble and persuasive tones :

"My friend, be a man! Women weep for the dead—men avenge them!"

"Oh, yes, yes!" cried D'Artagnan, "if it be to avenge her, I am ready to follow you."

Athos took advantage of this momentary strength, which the hope of vengeance had given to his unfortunate friend, to make a sign to Porthos and Aramis to go for the abbess. The two friends met her in the corridor, already much confounded and disturbed by so many events. She called some of the sisters, who, contrary to their conventional habits, found themselves in the presence of five men.

"Madame," said Athos, putting his arm under that of D'Artagnan, "we leave to your pious care the body of this unfortunate woman. She was an angel upon earth, before she became a saint in heaven. Treat her as if she had been one of your sisters: we will return some day to pray for her soul."

D'Artagnan hid his face against Athos's breast, and sobbed violently.

"Weep," said Athos; "weep, heart full of love, and youth, and life. Alas! would that I could weep as you do!" And he led his friend away; affectionately as a father, consolingly as a priest, and firmly, as a man who had himself endured much.

All five, followed by their servants leading their horses, then went towards the town of Bethune, of which the suburbs were within sight; and they stopped at the first hotel they found.

"But," asked D'Artagnan, "are we not going to follow that woman?"

"By-and-by," said Athos; "I have some preparations to make."

"She will escape," said the young man; "she will escape, Athos, and it will be your fault."

"I will answer for her," said Athos.

D'Artagnan had such perfect confidence in his friend's word, that he bowed his head and entered the hotel without making the least reply. Porthos and Aramis looked at each other, at a loss to understand the meaning of Athos. Lord de Winter thought that he only sought to soothe the grief of D'Artagnan.

"Now, gentlemen," said Athos, when he had ascertained that there were five unoccupied chambers in the hotel, "let each of us retire to his room. D'Artagnan ought to be alone to weep, and you to sleep. I take charge of everything; make yourselves perfectly easy."

"It appears to me, however," said Lord de Winter, "that if any measures are to be taken against the countess, the business is mine, seeing that she is my sister-in-law."

"And," said Athos, "she is my wife!"

D'Artagnan started, for he was satisfied that Athos was sure of his revenge, since he revealed such a secret. Porthos and Aramis looked at one another in consternation; and Lord de Winter thought that Athos had gone mad.

"Retire, then," said Athos, "and leave me to act. You see that, in my capacity of husband, this affair belongs to one. Only, D'Artagnan, if you have not lost it, give me that paper which fell from the man's hat, and on which the name of a village is written."

"Ah!" cried D'Artagnan, "I understand; that name is written by her hand——"

"You see," said Athos, "that there is a God in heaven."

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE MAN IN THE RED CLOAK.

THE despair of Athos had given place to a concentrated grief, which made the brilliant qualities of the man even more lucid. Entirely engrossed by one thought—that of the promise he had made, and of the responsibility he had undertaken—he was the last to retire into his chamber, where he requested the landlord to bring him a map of the province; and then he bent himself over it, examined the lines traced on it, and, ascertaining that four different roads led from Bethune to Armentières, he ordered the valets to be called.

Planchet, Grimaud, Musqueton, and Bazin entered, and received the clear, precise, and serious directions of Athos. At break of day, the next morning, they were to set off and proceed to Armentières, each by a different road. Planchet, the most intelligent of the four, was to follow that which had been taken by the carriage at which the three friends had fired, and which was attended, as may be remembered, by the servant of Count Rochefort.

Athos intrusted the valets with this duty, first, because since these men had been in his service or that of his friends, he had perceived in each of them some different and useful quality; and, next, because servants awaken less suspicion in the minds of the peasants than their masters, and excite more sympathy in the minds of those whom they address. And, lastly, My Lady knew the masters, whilst she did not know the servants, who, on the other hand, knew her ladyship well. They were all

four to be at an appointed place at eleven o'clock the next day. If they had discovered her ladyship's retreat, three of the four were to remain to watch her, and the fourth was to return to Bethune to inform Athos, and to guide the three friends.

These arrangements being made, the valets withdrew. Athos then arose from his seat, girded on his sword, wrapped himself up in his cloak, and left the hotel. It was about ten o'clock ; and at ten at night, in the country, the streets are but little frequented. Nevertheless, Athos was evidently looking out for some one, of whom he could ask a question. At last he met a late passenger, went up to him, and spoke a few words. The man he addressed started back in fear ; but yet he answered the inquiry of the musketeer by a sign. Athos offered the man half a pistole to accompany him, but he refused it. Athos then proceeded down the street which the man had pointed out with his finger ; but, reaching a spot where several streets met, he stopped again in visible embarrassment. But, as this was a more likely place than any other for some one to be seen, Athos waited there. In fact, a moment later a watchman passed. Athos repeated the question he had already asked of the person he first met. The watchman showed the same terror, and also refused to accompany him ; but he pointed to the road he was to take. Athos walked in the direction indicated, and soon reached the suburbs of the town, in the opposite direction to that by which he and his companions had entered. There, he again appeared uneasy and embarrassed, and stopped for the third time. Fortunately, a beggar who was passing by came up to solicit alms. Athos offered him a crown to accompany him where he was going. The beggar hesitated for an instant, but, at the sight of the piece of silver shining in the darkness, he assented, and walked before Athos.

Having reached the corner of the street, he pointed out, at a distance, a small, isolated, melancholy-looking house, to which Athos proceeded, whilst the beggar, who had received his wages, took himself off at his utmost speed.

Athos walked quite around this house before he could distinguish the door amid the red color with which the hut was painted. No light pierced through the crevices of the shutters; no sound gave reason to suppose it was inhabited; it was sad and silent as the tomb. Athos knocked three times before any answer was given. At the third knock, however, steps were heard approaching, the door was partially opened, and a man of tall stature, pale complexion, and black beard and hair, appeared. Athos exchanged a few words with him in a whisper, and then the tall man made a sign to the musketeer that he might come in. Athos immediately availed himself of the permission, and the door closed behind him.

The man whom Athos had come so far to seek, and whom he had found with so much difficulty, took him into a laboratory, where he was engaged in joining together, with iron wires, the clattering bones of a skeleton. All the body was already adjusted, and the head alone was lying on the table. All the furniture indicated that the owner of the room in which they were was engaged in natural science. There were bottles, full of serpents, labeled according to their kinds, and dried lizards, shining like emeralds, set in large frames of black wood. And lastly, boxes of wild, sweet-smelling plants, gifted undoubtedly with virtues unknown to mankind in general, were fastened to the ceiling, and hung down the corners of the room. But there was no family, no servant; the tall man inhabited the house alone.

Athos cast a cold and indifferent glance on the objects we have just described; and, on the invitation of the man whom he had come to seek, sat down beside him. He

then explained the cause of his visit, and the service he required of him; but, scarcely had he stated his demand, before the stranger, who had remained standing before the musketeer, started back in affright, and refused. Athos then drew from his pocket a small paper, on which two lines and a signature were written, accompanied by a seal, and presented it to him who had so prematurely shown these signs of repugnance. The tall man had scarcely read the two lines, and seen the signature, and recognized the seal, before he bowed his head, as a token that he had no longer any objection to make, and that he was prepared to obey. Athos demanded nothing more; he arose, left the house, returned by the road he had come, and re-entering the hotel, shut himself up in his own chamber,

At day-break, D'Artagnan entered his room, and asked him what they were to do.

“Wait,” replied Athos.

A few moments after, the superior of the convent sent to inform the musketeers that the funeral would take place at mid-day. As for the murderer, no tidings of her had been heard. It was, however, clear that she must have fled through the garden, on the gravel paths of which the traces of her steps could be discerned, and the door of which had been found locked, and the key missing.

At the appointed hour, Lord de Winter and the four friends proceeded to the convent. The bells were sounding, the chapel was open, and the grating of the chancel alone was closed. In front of the altar the body of the victim, clothed in the dress of a novice, lay exposed. On each side of the altar and behind the grating leading to the convent, the whole community of the Carmelites was assembled, listening to the sacred service, and mingling their strains with the songs of the priests, without seeing the profane, or being seen by them.

At the door of the chapel D'Artagnan felt his resolution wavering again, and turned to look for Athos : but he had disappeared. Faithful to his mission of vengeance, Athos had been shown into the garden, and there, on the gravel, following the light steps of that woman who had left a track of blood wherever she passed, he proceeded on until he reached the door which opened on the wood. He had this door unclosed, and plunged into the forest. But there, all his suspicions were confirmed. The road by which the carriage had disappeared, skirted the wood. Athos followed the road for some distance, with his eyes fixed upon the ground. Slight spots of blood, which proceeded from a wound inflicted either on the courier or on one of the horses, were perceptible on the road. About three-quarters of a league off, and fifty paces from Festubert, a large spot of blood was visible, and the ground was trodden by horses. Between the wood and this denunciatory spot, and rather behind the tramped earth, traces of the same small steps as those in the garden were distinguished. The carriage, therefore, had waited here: and here her ladyship had left the wood, and got into it.

Satisfied with this discovery, which confirmed all his conjectures, Athos returned to the hotel, where he found Planchet impatiently awaiting him. Everything had happened exactly as Athos had foreseen. Planchet had followed the path she had taken; had, like Athos, observed the marks of blood ; like Athos, too, he had discerned the spot where the carriage stopped. But he had gone on further than Athos ; so that, in the village of Festubert, whilst drinking in a tavern, he had, without the trouble of inquiry, learned that, at half-past eight on the previous evening, a wounded man, who attended a lady traveling in a post-carriage, had been obliged to stop, from inability to proceed further. The accident had been imputed to robbers who had stopped the carriage in the wood. The

man had remained in the village, but the woman had changed horses, and proceeded on her journey.

Planchet hunted out the postilion who had driven the carriage, and found him. He had taken the lady to Fromelles and from Fromelles she had gone on toward Armentières. Planchet had taken a cross-road, and at half-past seven in the morning he was at Armentières. There was only one hotel there, and Planchet presented himself at it as a servant who was looking out for a situation. He had not talked ten minutes with the servants of the inn, before he ascertained that a woman had arrived alone at ten o'clock the night before, and had taken a room, had sent for the landlord, and had told him that she wished to remain for some time in the neighborhood. Planchet wanted to know nothing more. He hastened to the place of appointment, found the three other valets at their posts, placed them as sentinels at all the outlets from the hotel, and returned to Athos, who had just finished receiving this information from Planchet when his friends returned.

All their faces were indicative of gloom—even the gentle countenance of Aramis.

“What must we do?” said D’Artagnan.

“Wait!” replied Athos.

Each retired to his own chamber.

At eight o’clock in the evening, Athos ordered the horses to be saddled, and notified Lord de Winter and his friends to prepare for the expedition. In an instant all the five were ready. Each looked at his arms, and put them in order. Athos came down the last, and found D’Artagnan already mounted, and impatient.

“Patience,” said Athos; “there is still some one wanting.”

The four horsemen looked around them in astonish-

ment, for they sought in vain in their own minds who could be the one still wanting.

At this moment Planchet led up Athos's horse. The musketeer leaped lightly into the saddle.

"Wait for me," said he; "I shall be back directly." And he went off at a gallop.

A quarter of an hour afterward he returned, accompanied by a man who wore a mask, and was wrapped in a red cloak. Lord de Winter and the three musketeers questioned one another by their glances, but none of them could give any information to the others, for all were ignorant about this man. And yet they concluded that it was as it ought to be, since it was Athos who had so arranged it.

At nine o'clock, guided by Planchet, the little cavalcade began its march, taking the same road that the carriage had followed. There was something mournful in the sight of these six men, riding in silence, each buried in his own thoughts, melancholy as despair, gloomy as revenge.

CHAPTER LXV.

THE JUDGMENT.

It was a dark and stormy night. Large clouds chased each other across the heavens, veiling the brightness of the stars. The moon would not arise till midnight. Sometimes, by the light of a flash that lit up the horizon, the road became perceptible, stretching itself, white and solitary, before them; and then, the flash extinguished, everything was again dark. At every instant Athos was obliged to check D'Artagnan, who was always at the head of the little troop, and compel him to take his place in the ranks, which, a moment later, he quitted again. He had only one thought—to go forward—and he went.

They passed in silence through the village of Festubert where the wounded servant had been left, and then they skirted the village of Richebourg. Having reached Herlier, Planchet who guided the party, turned to the left.

On several occasions, either Lord de Winter, or Porthos, or Aramis, had endeavored to address some remark to the man in the red cloak, but at each question he had bowed his head without reply. The travelers had thus comprehended that there was some reason for the stranger's silence, and they had ceased to speak to him.

The storm, too, became more violent: flashes rapidly succeeded one another; the thunder began to roll; and the wind, the precursor of the hurricane, whistled through the plumes and the hair of the horsemen. The cavalcade broke into a fast trot. A little way beyond Fromelles

the storm burst forth. There were still three leagues to travel; and they went them amidst torrents of rain.

D'Artagnan had taken off his hat, and did not wear his cloak. He found some pleasure in letting the water flow over his burning brow, and over his body, consumed by burning fever.

At the moment that the little troop had passed beyond Goskal, and was just arriving at the post-house, a man, who in the darkness, could not be distinguished from the trunk of a tree under which he had sheltered himself, advanced into the middle of the road, placing his finger on his lips. Athos recognized Grimaud.

"What is the matter now?" exclaimed D'Artagnan.
"Can she have quitted Armentières?"

Grimaud gave an affirmative nod of the head. D'Artagnan ground his teeth.

"Silence! D'Artagnan," said Athos: "I have taken charge of everything, and it is my business, therefore, to question Grimaud."

"Where is she?" demanded Athos.

Grimaud stretched forth his hand in the direction of the Lys.

"Is it far from here?"

Grimaud presented his forefinger bent.

"Alone?" demanded Athos.

Grimaud made a sign that she was.

"Gentlemen," said Athos, "she is half a league from this place, in the direction of the river."

"Good!" said D'Artagnan: "lead us on, Grimaud."

Grimaud took a cross-road, and guided the cavalcade. At the end of about five hundred yards they found a stream, which they forded. By the light of a flash, they perceived the village of Enguinchem.

"Is it there?" demanded D'Artagnan.

Grimaud shook his head negatively.

"Silence there!" said Athos.

The troop proceeded on its way. Another flash blazed forth; Grimaud extended his arm, and by the bluish light of the serpentine flame a small solitary house was perceptible on the bank of the river, not far from a ferry. There was a light at one window.

"We are there," said Athos.

At that moment a man, who was lying down in a ditch arose. It was Musqueton. He pointed with his finger to the window with the light. "She is there," said he.

"And Bazin?" demanded Athos.

"Whilst I watched the window, he watched the door."

"Good!" said Athos: "you are all faithful servants."

Athos leaped from his horse, of which he gave the bridle into the hands of Grimaud, and advanced in the direction of the window, after having made a sign to the remainder of the troop to proceed toward the door.

The small house was surrounded by a quickset hedge of two or three feet in height. Athos sprang over the hedge, and went up to the window, which had no shutters on the outside, but of which the short curtains were closely drawn. He climbed upon the ledge of the stone, that his eye might be above the level of the curtains. By the light of a lamp, he could perceive a woman, covered by a dark-colored cloak, seated on a stool before a dying fire. Her elbows were placed upon a wretched table, and she rested her head on her hands which were as white as ivory. Her face was not visible, but an inauspicious smile rose upon the lips of Athos. He was not mistaken. He had, in truth, found the woman that he sought.

At this moment a horse neighed. Her ladyship raised her head, saw the pale face of Athos staring through the window, and screamed out.

Perceiving that he had been seen, Athos pushed the window with his hand and knee; it gave way; the panes

were broken, and Athos, like a specter of vengeance, leaped into the room. Her ladyship ran to the door and opened it. Paler, and more threatening than even Athos himself, D'Artagnan was standing on the sill. Her ladyship started back, and screamed. D'Artagnan, imagining that she had some means of flight, and fearing that she might escape him, drew out a pistol from his belt. But Athos raised his hand.

"Replace your weapon, D'Artagnan," said he; "it is imperative that this woman should be judged and not assassinated. Wait awhile, D'Artagnan, and you shall be satisfied. Come in, gentlemen."

D'Artagnan obeyed; for Athos had the solemn voice and authoritative air of a judge commissioned by the Deity himself. Behind D'Artagnan there came Porthos, Aramis, Lord de Winter, and the man in the red cloak. The four valets watched at the door and window. Her ladyship had sunk upon her chair with her hands stretched out, as if to exorcise this terrible apparition. On seeing her brother-in-law she uttered a fearful scream.

"What do you want?" demanded her ladyship.

"We seek," said Athos, "Charlotte Backson who was called, first the Countess de la Fère, then Lady de Winter baroness of Sheffield."

"I am that person," murmured she, overwhelmed with fear. "What do you want with me?"

"We want to judge you according to your crimes," said Athos. "You will be free to defend yourself; and to justify your conduct, if you can. M. d'Artagnan, you must be the first accuser."

D'Artagnan came forward. "Before God and men," said he, "I accuse this woman of having poisoned Constance Bonancieux, who died last night."

He turned toward Aramis and Porthos. "We can bear witness to it," said the two musketeers at the same time.

D'Artagnan continued :

"Before God and before men I accuse this woman of having wished to poison me with some wine, which she sent me from Villeroi, with a forged letter, as if the wine had come from my friends. God preserved me: but a man named Brisemont was killed instead of me."

"We bear witness to this," said Porthos and Aramis, as with one voice.

"Before God and before men," continued D'Artagnan, "I accuse this woman of having urged me to the murder of the Baron de Wardes; and as no one is present to bear witness to it, I myself will attest it. I have done." And D'Artagnan crossed over to the other side of the room, with Porthos and Aramis.

"It is now for you to speak, my lord," said Athos.

The baron came forward in his turn: "Before God and before men," said he, "I accuse this woman of having caused the Duke of Buckingham to be assassinated."

"The Duke of Buckingham assassinated!" exclaimed all, with one accord.

"Yes," said the baron, "assassinated. From the warning letter which you sent me, I caused this woman to be arrested, and put her under the custody of a faithful follower. She corrupted that man; she placed the dagger in his hand; she made him kill the duke; and at this moment, perhaps, Felton has paid with his head for the crimes of this fury."

A shudder ran through the company at the revelation of these hitherto unknown crimes.

"This is not all," resumed Lord de Winter. "My brother, who had made you his heiress, died in three hours of a strange malady, which left livid spots on his body. Sister, how did your husband die?"

"Oh horror!" exclaimed Porthos and Aramis.

"Murderess of Buckingham; murdereress of Felton; mur-

deress of my brother, I demand justice on you, and declare that if it be not accorded to me, I will execute it myself."

Lord de Winter ranged himself by the side of D'Artagnan, leaving his place open to another accuser.

Her ladyship's head sank upon her hands, and she endeavored to recall her thoughts, which were confused by a deadly giddiness.

"It is now my turn," said Athos, trembling as the lion trembles at the aspect of a serpent: "it is now my turn. I married this woman when she was a young girl. I married her in spite of all my family. I gave her my property; I gave her my name; and one day I discovered that this woman was branded—this woman bore the mark of a fleur-de-lis upon the left shoulder."

"Oh!" said her ladyship, rising, "I defy you to find the tribunal which pronounced on me that infamous sentence—I defy you to find the man who executed it!"

"Silence!" exclaimed a voice. "It is for me to answer that!" And the man in the red cloak came forward.

"Who is that man? What is that man?" cried out her ladyship, suffocated with terror, and with her hair raising itself on her head, as if it had been endowed with life.

Every eye was turned toward that man, for he was unknown to all except Athos. And even Athos looked at him with as much astonishment as the others, for he knew not how he could be connected with the horrible drama which was at that moment enacting there. After slowly and solemnly approaching her ladyship, till the table alone separated them, the stranger took off his mask.

Her ladyship looked for some time with increasing terror at that pale countenance, begirt with black hair, of which the only expression was that of a stern and frozen

insensibility ; then, suddenly rising, and retreating toward the wall,—

“ Oh ! no, no,” exclaimed she, “ it is an infernal apparition ! It is not he. Help ! help ! ” she screamed out, in a hoarse voice, still pressing toward the wall, as if she could open a passage through it with her hands.

“ But who are you ? ” exclaimed all the witnesses of this scene.

“ Ask this woman,” said the man in the red cloak, “ for you see plainly that she has recognized me.”

“ The executioner of Lille, the executioner of Lille ! ” cried My Lady, overcome by wild affright, and clinging to the wall with her hands for support.

All of them recoiled, and the tall man stood alone in the middle of the room.

“ Oh ! mercy ! mercy ! ” cried the miserable woman, falling on her knees.

The stranger paused for silence. “ I told you truly that she had recognized me,” said he. “ Yes, I’m the executioner of Lille, and here is my history.”

All eyes were fixed upon this man, whose words were listened to with the most anxious avidity.

“ This woman was formerly a young girl, as beautiful as she is at present. She was a nun, in a Benedictine convent at Templemar. A young priest of a simple and credulous nature performed service in the church of the convent; she attempted to seduce him, and succeeded. She would have seduced a saint.

The vows which they had both taken were sacred and irrevocable. She persuaded him to quit the country. But, to quit the country, to fly together, to get to some part of France where they might live in peace, because they would be unknown, they required money. Neither of them had any. The priest stole the sacred vessels and sold them ; but just as they were making ready to escape,

they were both arrested. Eight days afterward she had corrupted the jailer's son, and saved herself. The young priest was condemned to be branded, and to ten years of chains. I was the executioner of Lille, as this woman says. I was obliged to brand the criminal, and that criminal was my own brother! I then swore that this woman, who had ruined him—who was more than his accomplice, since she had instigated him to the crime—should at any rate partake his punishment. I suspected where she was concealed. I followed and discovered her. I caught her, I bound her, and imprinted the same brand on her that I had stamped upon my own brother.

“The next day, on my return to Lille, my brother also managed to escape. I was accused as his accomplice, and was condemned to remain in prison in his place, so long as he should continue at large. My poor brother was not aware of this sentence : he had rejoined this woman ; and they fled together into Berri ; here he obtained a small curacy. This woman passed for his sister. The owner of the estate to which the curacy belonged saw this pretended sister, and fell in love with her. His passion led him to propose to marry her. She left the man whom she had destroyed, and became the Countess de la Fère.”

All eyes were turned toward Athos, whose true name this was ; and he made a sign that the executioner's tale was true.

“Then,” continued the latter, “maddened by despair, and resolved to terminate an existence of which the happiness and honor had been thus destroyed, my poor brother returned to Lille and hearing the sentence which had condemned me in his place, he delivered himself up as a prisoner, and hung himself the same night to the grating of his dungeon. After all, to do them justice, they who

had condemned me kept their word. Scarcely was the identity of the dead body proved, before my liberty was restored. These are the crimes of which I accuse her—these are my reasons for branding her!"

"M. d'Artagnan," said Athos, "what is the punishment that you demand against this woman?"

"The punishment of death!" replied D'Artagnan.

"My Lord de Winter," continued Athos, "what punishment do you demand against this woman?"

"Death!" replied his lordship.

"Messieurs Porthos and Aramis," said Athos, "you who are her judges, what punishment do you pronounce against this woman?"

"The punishment of death!" replied the two musketeers, in a hollow voice.

Her ladyship uttered a fearful cry, and dragged herself a few paces on her knees toward her judges. Athos stretched out his hand toward her. "Charlotte Backson," said he, "Countess de la Fère, Lady de Winter, your crimes have wearied men on earth and God in heaven. If you know any prayer, repeat it; for you are condemned, and are about to die."

At these words, which left no hope, her ladyship raised herself to her full height, and attempted to speak. But her voice failed her. She felt a strong and pitiless hand seize her by the hair, and drag her on, as irrevocably as fate drags on mankind. She did not, therefore, even attempt to make any resistance, but left the cottage.

Lord de Winter and the four friends went out after her. The valets followed their masters, and the chamber was left empty, with its window, its open door, and the smoking lamp burning sadly on the table.

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE EXECUTION.

IT was almost midnight. The waning moon, as red as blood from the lingering traces of the storm, was rising behind the little village of Armentières, which exhibited in that pale light, the gloomy profile of its houses, and the skeleton of its high ornamented steeple. In front, the Lys rolled along its waters like a river of molten fire; whilst on its other bank, a dark mass of trees was sharply outlined upon a stormy sky, covered by large copper-colored clouds, which created a sort of twilight in the middle of the night. To the left, arose an old deserted mill, of which the sails were motionless, and from the ruins of which an owl was uttering its sharp, monotonous, recurring screech. Here and there on the plain, to the right and to the left of the path which the melancholy band was taking, there appeared a few short and stunted trees, which looked like distorted dwarfs crouched down to watch the men in that ill-omened hour.

From time to time a brilliant flash opened up the horizon in its whole extent, playing above the black mass of trees, and coming, like a frightful cimeter, to divide the sky and water into equal parts. Not a breath of air was stirring in the heavy atmosphere. A silence as of death weighed down all nature. The earth was moist and slippery from the recent rain; and reanimated plants sent forth their perfumes with more vigorous energy.

Two of the servants, each holding an arm, were leading

her ladyship along. The executioner walked behind. The four musketeers and Lord de Winter followed him.

Planchet and Bazin brought up the rear.

The two valets led her ladyship toward the side of the river. Her mouth was silent, but her eyes were inexpressibly eloquent, supplicating by turns each of those on whom she looked. Finding herself a few paces in advance, she said to the valets :

“A thousand pistoles for each of you, if you will assist me to escape; but if you give me up to your masters, I have some avengers near, who will make you pay dearly for my death.”

Grimaud hesitated, and Musqueton trembled in every limb.

Athos, who had heard her ladyship’s voice came up immediately, as did also Lord de Winter.

“Send away these valets,” said he; “she has spoken to them, and they are no longer safe.”

They called Planchet and Bazin, who took the places of Grimaud and Musqueton.

Having reached the brink of the stream, the executioner came up, and bound her ladyship’s hands and feet.

She then broke her silence to exclaim—“You are cowards—you are miserable assassins. You, come, ten of you, to murder a poor woman! But, beware! If I am not succored, I shall be avenged.”

“You are not a woman,” replied Athos, coldly: “you do not belong to the human race: you are a demon, escaped from hell, and to hell we shall send you back.”

“Oh! you virtuous gentlemen!” said her ladyship, “remember that he amongst you who touches a hair of my head is himself a murderer.”

“The executioner can kill without being on that account a murderer, madame,” said the man in the cloak, striking his large sword. “He is the last judge on earth,

that is all. *Nachrichter*, as our German neighbors say."

And, as he was binding her whilst he uttered these words, her ladyship sent forth two or three wild screams, which had a startling melancholy affect, as they were borne on the night, and lost themselves in the depths of the woods.

"But, if I am guilty—if I have committed the crimes of which you accuse me," howled out her ladyship, "take me before a regular tribunal. You are not judges—you have no power to condemn me!"

"I did propose Tyburn," answered Lord de Winter: "why did you not accept my offer?"

"Because I do not wish to die," exclaimed her ladyship, struggling, "because I am too young to die!"

"The woman whom you poisoned at Bethune was still younger than you are, madame: and yet she is dead," said D'Artagnan.

"I will enter a convent; I will become a nun," cried her ladyship.

"You were in a convent," said the executioner, "and you left it to destroy my brother."

Her ladyship sent forth a cry of terror, and fell upon her knees. The executioner lifted her in his arms, and prepared to carry her to the boat.

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed she, "my God! are you going to drown me?"

These cries had something so heartrending in them, that D'Artagnan, who was at first the most unrelenting in his pursuit of her ladyship, sunk down upon the stump of a tree, letting his head fall on his bosom, and stopping his ears with the palms of his hands: and yet, in spite of all this, he still heard her menaces and cries. D'Artagnan was the youngest of all these men, and his heart failed him.

"Oh! I cannot bear this frightful spectacle," said he; "I cannot consent that this woman should die thus."

Her ladyship heard these words, and they gave her a new gleam of hope. "D'Artagnan! D'Artagnan!" exclaimed she, "remember that once I loved you!"

The young man rose, and made one step toward her. But Athos drew his sword and placed himself in his path.

"If you take one step more, D'Artagnan," said he, "we must cross our swords together."

D'Artagnan fell on his knees and prayed.

"Come," continued Athos, "executioner, do your duty."

"Willingly, my lord," replied the executioner; "for as truly as I am a good Catholic, I firmly believe that I act justly in exercising my office on this woman."

"That is right." Athos took one step toward her ladyship. "I pardon you," said he, "the evil you have done me. I forgive you for my ruined future, my lost honor, my tainted love, and my salvation forever periled by the despair into which you have thrown me. Die in peace!"

Lord de Winter next came forward. "I pardon you," said he, "the poisoning of my brother, the assassination of the Duke of Buckingham, and the death of poor Felton. I forgive you your attempts on my own person. Die in peace."

"As for me," said D'Artagnan, "pardon me, madame, for having, by a deceit unworthy of a gentlemen, provoked your rage; and, in exchange, I pardon you for the murder of my poor friend, and your cruel vengeance on myself. I pardon and I pity you. Die in peace!"

"*I am lost!*" murmured her ladyship, in English—"I must die!"

She then arose by herself, and threw around her one of



ALBOS DEL ACERDE DE LOS SUELOS DE LA FONDO

those clear glances, which seemed to emanate from an eye of fire. But she could see nothing. She listened: but she heard nothing. There were none around her but her enemies.

"Where am I to die?" demanded she.

"On the other bank of the river," replied the executioner.

He then made her enter the boat; and, as he was stepping in after her, Athos gave him a sum of money.

"Here," said he, "here is the price of the execution, that it may be seen that we are really judges."

"It is well," said the executioner; "but let this woman now know that I am not executing business, but my duty." And he threw the money from him into the river.

"Mark," said Athos, "this woman has a child, and yet she has not said one word about him."

The boat proceeded toward the left bank of the Lys, carrying away the criminal and the executioner. All the others continued on the right bank, where they had sunk upon their knees. The boat glided slowly along the rope of the ferry, under the reflection of a pale mist, which skimmed the water at that moment.

It arrived at the other bank, and the two figures stood out in blackness on the red horizon.

During the passage her ladyship had managed to loosen the cord that bound her feet, and on reaching the bank she leaped lightly on shore, and took to flight. But the ground was moist; and, at the top of the shelving bank, she slipped and fell upon her knees. Probably a superstitious idea had struck her. She understood that Heaven refused to aid her, and remained in the attitude in which she had fallen, her head drooping and her hands clasped together. Then, from the other shore, they could see the executioner slowly raise his two arms, a ray of the moon was reflected on the blade of his large sword, the two arms descended, they heard the whistling of the cimeter and

the cry of the victim, and then a mutilated mass sunk down beneath the blow. The executioner took off his red cloak, stretched it out on the ground, laid the body on it, and threw in the head, tied it by the four corners, raised it upon his shoulders, and again entered the boat. Having reached the middle of the Lys, he stopped the boat, and holding his burden over the river :

“Let the justice of God have its course!” he exclaimed in a loud voice. And so saying, he dropped the dead body into the deepest part of the waters, which closed above it.

CHAPTER LXVII.

A MESSAGE FROM THE CARDINAL.

THREE days afterward the four musketeers re-entered Paris. They were within the limit of their leave, and the same evening they went to pay the usual visit to M. de Treville.

"Well, gentlemen," inquired the brave captain, "have you found good amusements in your excursion?"

"Prodigiously so," replied Athos, in his own name, and that of his companions.

On the sixth of the following month, the king, according to his promise to the cardinal to return to Rochelle, quitted Paris, still quite stunned by the news of the assassination of Buckingham which was beginning to circulate in the city.

Although warned of a danger in the path of a man whom she had so truly loved, yet the queen, when his death was announced to her would not believe it; she had even the imprudence to exclaim—"It is false! he has just written to me."

But the next day there was no refusing credence to this fatal news. Laporte, having, like every one else, been detained by the order of Charles I., at length arrived, and brought with him the last dying gift which Buckingham had sent to the queen.

The king's joy had been extreme. He had not taken the slightest pains to disguise it, but manifested it affectedly before the queen. Louis XIII., like all men of weak hearts, was wanting in generosity. But the king soon

again became melancholy and ill. His brow was not one of those that can continue long unruffled; he felt that, in returning to the camp, he returned to slavery; and yet he did return there. The cardinal was, to him, the fascinating serpent; and he was the bird that flies from bough to bough without a possibility of making his escape.

The return to La Rochelle was, therefore, profoundly sad. Our four friends, especially, excited the astonishment of their companions; they travelled side by side, with heavy eyes and heads depressed. Athos alone sometimes raised his broad forehead; a glance shot from his eye, a bitter smile passed across his lips, and then, like his comrades, he sunk again into his reveries. As soon as they arrived in any town, after they had conducted the king to his apartments, the four friends withdrew, either to their own lodgings, or to some secluded tavern, where they neither played nor drank, but spoke in a low voice together, and looked attentively that none might hear them.

One day that the king had halted to hunt the magpie, and the four friends, according to their custom, instead of joining in the sport, had stopped at a tavern by the roadside, a man, who was coming post from La Rochelle, stopped at the door to drink a glass of wine, and looked into the chamber where the four musketeers were seated at a table.

“Hallo, M. d’Artagnan,” said he, “is it you that I see there?”

D’Artagnan raised his head, and uttered an exclamation of joy. This man who now called him was his phantom; it was the stranger of Meung, of the Rue des Fossyeurs, and of Arras. D’Artagnan drew his sword, and rushed toward the door. But on this occasion, the stranger, instead of hastening away, jumped off his horse, and advanced to meet D’Artagnan.

"Ah! sir," said the young man, "I meet you at last. This time you shall not escape me."

"It is not my intention either, sir: for I am looking for you this time. In the king's name, I arrest you."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed D'Artagnan.

"I say that you must give up your sword to me, sir, and without resistance, too. Your life depends upon it, I assure you."

"Who are you, then?" demanded D'Artagnan, lowering his sword, but not yet giving it up.

"I am the Chevalier de Rochefort," said the stranger, "the Cardinal de Richelieu's master of the horse, and I am commanded to conduct you before his eminence."

"We are now returning to his eminence, sir," said Athos, coming forward, "and you must take M. d'Artagnan's word that he will go direct to La Rochelle."

"I ought to place him in the hands of the guards, who will conduct him back to the camp."

"We will serve as such, sir, on our words as gentlemen! But on our words as gentlemen, also," continued Athos, frowning, "M. d'Artagnan shall not be taken from us."

De Rochefort threw a glance around him, and saw that Porthos and Aramis had placed themselves between him and the door; and he understood that he was entirely at the mercy of these four men. "Gentlemen," said he, "if M. d'Artagnan will deliver up his sword, and join his word to yours, I shall be content with your promise, of conducting him to the quarters of his eminence the cardinal."

"You have my word, sir, and here is my sword," said D'Artagnan.

"That suits me so much the better," said Rochefort, "for I must continue my journey."

"If it is to rejoin My Lady," said Athos, coolly, "it is useless; you will not find her."

"And what has become of her?" asked Rochefort, anxiously.

"Return to the camp and you will learn!"

Rochefort remained in thought for an instant; and then, as they were only one day's journey from Surgeres, where the cardinal was to meet the king, he resolved to follow Athos's advice and to return with them. Besides, this plan had the further advantage of enabling him, personally, to watch the prisoner. Thus they proceeded on their way.

The next day, at three in the afternoon, they reached Surgeres. The cardinal was waiting there for Louis XIII. The minister and the king exchanged their caresses freely and congratulated each other on the happy chance which had freed France from the inveterate enemy who was arming Europe against her. After this, the cardinal, who had been informed by Rochefort that D'Artagnan had been arrested, and who was eager to examine him, took leave of the king, inviting his majesty to go the next day to see the works at the embankment, which were at last complete.

On returning in the evening to his quarters, near the Pont de Pierre, the cardinal found the three musketeers all armed; and D'Artagnan, who was without his sword, standing before the door of the house which he inhabited. On this occasion, as he was in full force, he looked sternly at them, and made a sign with his eye and hand for D'Artagnan to follow him. D'Artagnan obeyed.

"We will wait for you, D'Artagnan," said Athos, loud enough for the cardinal to hear.

His eminence knitted his brow, stopped for an instant, and then went on, without uttering a single word.

D'Artagnan entered behind the cardinal, and Rochefort

followed D'Artagnan ; the door was guarded. His eminence entered the chamber which he used as a cabinet, and signed to Rochefort to introduce the young musketeer. Rochefort obeyed, and retired.

D'Artagnan stood alone before the cardinal. It was his second interview with Richelieu ; and he afterward confessed that he felt quite convinced it was to be his last. Richelieu remained leaning upon the chinaney-piece, and there was a table standing between him and D'Artagnan.

"Sir," said the cardinal, "you have been arrested by my orders."

"I have been informed so, my lord."

"Do you know why?"

"No, my lord; for the only thing for which I ought to be arrested is yet unknown to your eminence."

Richelieu looked earnestly at the young man.

"Hallo!" said he, "what does this mean?"

"If your eminence will first tell me the charges against me, I will afterward tell you what I have done."

"There are crimes imputed to you which have cost the heads of people higher far than you are," replied the cardinal.

"And what are they, my lord?" demanded D'Artagnan, with a calmness which surprised even the cardinal himself.

"You are accused of corresponding with the enemies of the realm; of having pried into state secrets; and of having attempted to make our general's plans miscarry."

"And who is my accuser, my lord?" inquired D'Artagnan, who had no doubt that it was her ladyship : "a woman branded by the justice of her country—a woman who was married to one man in France, and to another in England—a woman who did poison her second husband, and attempted to poison me!"

"What are you saying, sir?" exclaimed the astonished cardinal, "and of what woman are you thus speaking?"

"Of Lady de Winter," replied D'Artagnan: "yes, of Lady de Winter—of whose crimes your eminence was undoubtedly ignorant when you honored her with your confidence."

"Sir," replied the cardinal, "if Lady de Winter has been guilty of the crimes you have mentioned, she shall be punished."

"She *is* punished, my lord."

"And who has punished her?"

"We have."

"She is in prison, then?"

"She is dead."

"Dead!" repeated the cardinal, who could not credit what he heard: "dead! Did you not say that she was dead?"

"Three times had she endeavored to kill me, and I forgave her; but she murdered the woman I loved: and then my friends and I seized her, tried her, and condemned her."

D'Artagnan then related the poisoning of Madame Bonancieux in the Carmelite convent at Bethune, the trial in the solitary house, and the execution on the banks of the Lys.

A shudder ran throughout the frame of the cardinal, who did not shudder easily. But suddenly, as if from the influence of some silent thought, his dark countenance became gradually clearer, and at last attained perfect serenity.

"So," said he, in a voice, the gentleness of which contrasted strangely with the severity of his words, "you constituted yourselves the judges, without considering that those who are not legally appointed, and who punish without authority, are assassins."

"My lord, I swear to you that I have not for one instant thought of defending my head against your eminence. I will submit to whatever punishment your eminence may please to inflict. I do not value life sufficiently to fear death."

"Yes, I know it: you are a man of courage, sir," said the cardinal, in a voice almost affectionate. "I may therefore tell you beforehand that you will be tried, and even condemned."

"Another might reply to your eminence, that he had his pardon in his pocket. I content myself with saying—command, my lord, and I am ready."

"Your pardon!" said Richelieu in surprise.

"Yes, my lord," replied D'Artagnan.

"And signed by whom? By the king?" The cardinal pronounced these words with a singular expression of contempt.

"No: by your eminence."

"By me? You are mad, sir."

"Your eminence will undoubtedly recognize your own writing?"

And D'Artagnan presented to the cardinal the precious paper which Athos had extorted from her ladyship, and which he had given to D'Artagnan to serve him as a safeguard.

The cardinal took the paper and read in a very slow voice, and dwelling upon each syllable.

"It is by my order, and for the good of the state that the bearer of this has done what he has done.

"RICHELIEU."

The cardinal, after having read these lines, fell into a profound reverie, but did not return the paper to D'Artagnan.

"He is deciding by what kind of punishment I am to die," said the Gascon to himself. "Well, faith! he shall see how a gentleman can die." The young musketeer was in an excellent frame of mind for ending his career heroically.

Richelieu continued his meditation, rolling and unrolling the paper in his hand. At last he raised his head, and fixing his eagle eye upon that loyal, open, and intelligent countenance, read upon that face, all furrowed with tears, the sufferings which had been endured within a month, and he then thought, for the third or fourth time, what futurity might have in store for such a youth of barely twenty years of age and what resources his activity and courage, and intelligence might offer to a good master. On the other side, the crimes, the power, the almost infernal genius of her ladyship had more than once alarmed him, and he felt a secret joy at being forever freed from so dangerous an accomplice. He slowly tore up the paper that D'Artagnan had so generously returned to him.

"I am lost," said D'Artagnan in his own heart.

The cardinal approached the table, and without sitting down, wrote some words on a parchment, of which two thirds were already filled up, and then fixed his seal upon it.

"That is my condemnation," thought D'Artagnan: "he spares me the misery of the Bastile, and the details of a trial. It is really very kind of him."

"Here, sir," said the cardinal to the young man: "I took one *carte-blanche* from you, and I give you another. The name is not inserted in the commission: you will write it yourself."

D'Artagnan took the paper with hesitation, and cast his eyes upon it. It was the commission of a lieutenancy in the musketeers. D'Artagnan fell at the cardinal's feet,

"My lord," said he, "my life is yours—make use of it

henceforth ; but this favor, which you bestow upon me, is beyond my merits : I have three friends who are more worthy of it."

" You are a brave youth, D'Artagnan," said the cardinal, tapping him familiarly on the shoulder, in his delight at having conquered that rebellious nature—" do what you like with this commission, as the name is omitted; only remember that it is to you I give it."

" Your eminence may rest assured," said D'Artagnan, " that I will never forget it."

The cardinal turned and said aloud :

" Rochefort!"

The chevalier, who had undoubtedly been behind the door, immediately entered.

" Rochefort," said the cardinal, " you see M. d'Artagnan ? I receive him into the number of my friends. Embrace one another and behave yourselves, if you wish to keep your heads."

D'Artagnan and Rochefort embraced coldly, but the cardinal was watching them with his vigilant eye. They left the room at the same moment.

" We shall meet again," they both said, " shall we not ?"

" Whenever you please," said D'Artagnan.

" The opportunity will come," replied Rochefort.

" Hum ! " said Richelieu, opening the door.

The two men bowed to his eminence, smiled, and pressed each other's hands.

" We began to be impatient," said Athos.

" Here I am, my friends," replied D'Artagnan.

" Free ? "

" Not only free, but in favor."

" You must tell us all about it."

" Yes, this evening. But, for the present, let us separate."

In fact, in the evening D'Artagnan went to Athos's lodg

ings, and found him emptying a bottle of Spanish wine, an occupation which he pursued religiously every night. He told him all that had taken place between the cardinal and himself, and drew the commission from his pocket.

"Here, dear Athos," said he, "here is something which naturally belongs to you."

Athos smiled, with his soft and gentle smile.

"Friend," said he, "it is too much for Athos—for the Count de la Fère, it is too little. Keep this commission; it belongs to you. Alas! you have bought it dearly enough!"

D'Artagnan left Athos's room, and went to Porthos.

He found him clad in a most magnificent coat, covered with splendid embroidery, and admiring himself in a glass.

"Ah! is it you, my friend?" said Porthos; "how do you think this dress suits me?"

"Beautifully," replied D'Artagnan; "but I am going to offer to you one which will become you still more."

"What is it?" demanded Porthos.

"That of lieutenant of the musketeers." And D'Artagnan, having related to Porthos his interview with the cardinal, drew the commission from his pocket. "Here," said he, "write your name upon it, and be a kind officer to me."

Porthos glanced over the commission, and returned it, to the great astonishment of the young man.

"Yes," said Porthos, "that would flatter me very much, but I could not long enjoy the favor. During our expedition to Bethune, the husband of my duchess died; so that, my dear boy, as the strong-box of the defunct is holding out its arms to me, I marry the widow. You see I am fitting on my wedding garments. So keep the lieutenancy, my dear fellow—keep it." And he returned it to D'Artagnan.

The young man then repaired to Aramis. He found him kneeling before an oratory, with his forehead leaning on an open book of prayers. He told him also of his interview with the cardinal, and, for the third time, taking the commission from his pocket :

" You, our friend, our light, our invisible protector," said he, " accept this commission : you have deserved it more than any by your wisdom, and your counsels, always followed by such fortunate results."

" Alas ! dear friend," said Aramis, " our last adventures have entirely disgusted me with the soldier's life. My decision is, this time, irrevocable. After the siege, I shall enter the Lazaristes. Keep the commission, D'Artagnan. The profession of arms suits you ; you will be a brave and adventurous captain."

D'Artagnan, with an eye moist with gratitude, and brilliant with joy, returned to Athos, whom he found still seated at table, admiring his last glass of Malaga by the light of his lamp.

" Well," said he, " they have both refused it."

" It is, dear friend, because no one is more worthy of it than yourself."

He took a pen, wrote the name of D'Artagnan upon it, and gave it back to him.

" I shall no longer have my friends, then," said the young man. " Alas ! nothing, henceforth, but bitter recollections." And he let his head fall between his hands, whilst two tears rolled along his cheeks.

" You are young," said Athos, " and your bitter recollections have time to change themselves into tender remembrances."

EPILOGUE.

LA ROCHELLE, deprived of the assistance of the English fleet, and of the succor which had been promised by Buckingham, surrendered after a year's siege. On the twenty-eighth of October, 1628, the capitulation was signed.

The king entered Paris on the twenty-third of December of the same year. He was received in triumph as though he had subdued an enemy instead of Frenchmen. He passed, under green arches, through the suburb of Saint-Jacques.

D'Artagnan took his promotion. Porthos left the service, and married Madame Coquenard, in the course of the following year. The strong-box, so much coveted, contained eight hundred thousand livres. Musqueton had a superb livery, and enjoyed the satisfaction, which he had desired all his life, of riding behind a gilded carriage.

Aramis, after a journey to Lorraine, suddenly disappeared, and ceased to write to his friends. They learnt afterward, through Madame de Chevreuse, that he had assumed the cowl in a monastery at Nancy. Bazin became a lay brother.

Athos remained a musketeer, under D'Artagnan's command, until 1633 ; at which time, after a journey to Rousillon, he also left the service, under pretext of having succeeded to a small inheritance in the Blaisois. Grimaud followed Athos.

D'Artagnan fought three times with Rochefort; and three times wounded him.

"I shall probably kill you the fourth time," said he to Rochefort, as he stretched forth a hand to raise him up.

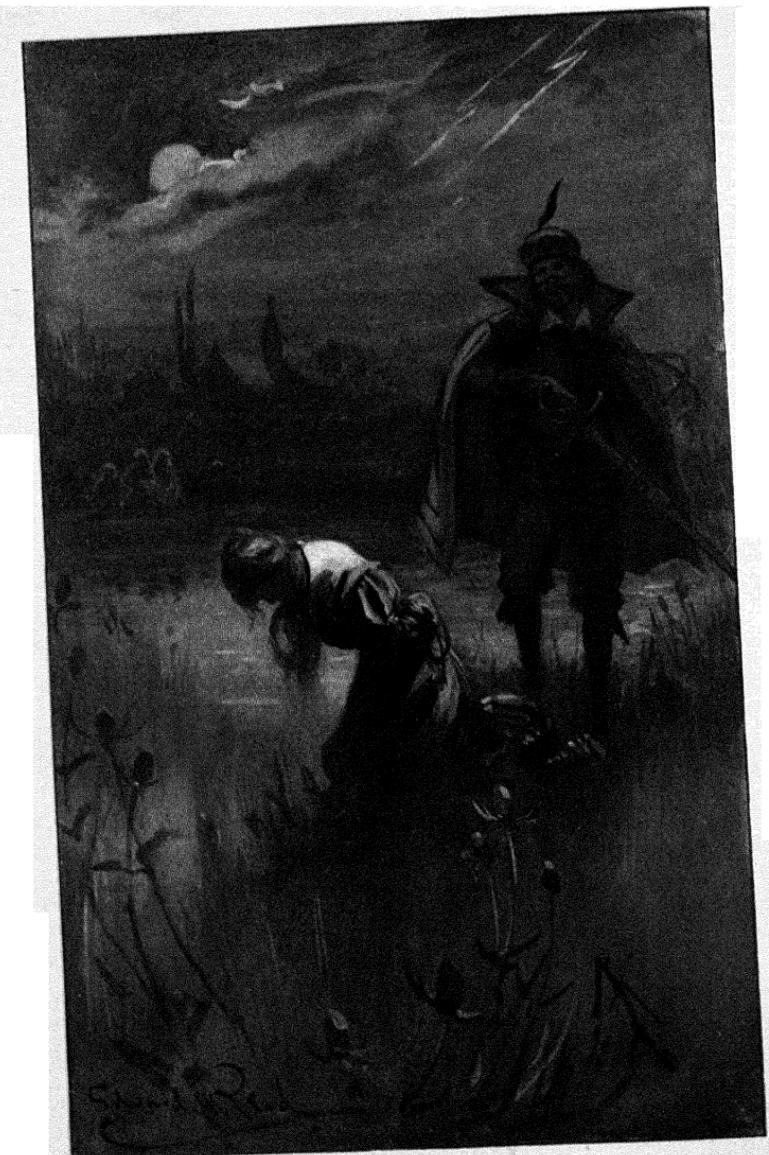
"It would be better for both of us to stop where we are," replied the wounded man. "Egad ! I have been more your friend than your enemy ; for, after our first meeting, I could have got your head off by one word to the cardinal."

They embraced, but this time it was in sincerity, and without malice.

Planchet obtained, through Rochefort, the rank of sergeant in the regiment of Piedmont.

M. Bonancieux lived in great tranquillity, entirely ignorant of what had become of his wife, and not disturbing himself about her. One day he had the imprudence to recall himself to the cardinal's recollection. The cardinal told him that he would so provide for him that he should never want anything for the future. In fact, the next day M. Bonancieux, having left home at seven o'clock in the evening, to go to the Louvre, was never seen again in the Rue de Fossoyeurs. The opinion of those who thought themselves the best informed was, that he was boarded and lodged in some royal castle, at the expense of his generous eminence.

THE END.



But the soil was moist, for, gaining the top of the bank, she slipped
and fell on her knees.

THE ARAMIS EDITION

THE
THREE MUSKETEERS

BY
ALEXANDRE DUMAS

IN TWO VOLUMES
VOL. II.

LONDON
THE WAVERLEY BOOK COMPANY, LTD.
96 FARRINGDON STREET, E.C.